

**THE UNIVERSITY OF WINCHESTER**

**Faculty of Education, Health and Social Care**

**Exploring the Value of a Staff-Student Shadowing Scheme**

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**Doctor of Education**

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## **ABSTRACT FOR THESIS**

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This study critically examines the value of a university-based staff-student shadowing scheme, the aims of which were to increase staff understanding of the daily experience of students and through this to suggest ways in which students' experience could be enhanced, for example through improvements to services, systems or facilities. The value, as perceived by eleven staff participants, is situated within an exploration of issues of ethics and power relations arising from the application of a limited form of corporate ethnography to a higher education context, when both researcher and 'shadowers' are insiders.

Shadowers were drawn from a range of academic and non-academic roles across the University, with differing levels of seniority. Students were volunteers representing a variety of programmes. Principal research methods were interviews with staff, together with questionnaire surveys of staff and students and my own participation as a shadower. The project was conducted as insider/practitioner action research and was, in a sense, institutional research into a form of institutional research, investigating the insights gained by staff.

The study employed ethnographic methods to explore ethical issues which emerged for participants and the effects of power relations and positions on perceptions of the scheme, its operation and outcomes. These are discussed with reference to Foucault's writings on discipline, surveillance and power. The study raises questions about shadowing as a method, discussing in particular its focus on unique experiences of individuals, thus aiming to contribute to the limited body of literature in this area.

A key contribution of the study is its exploration of the interplay of power relations in a senior management-initiated scheme, within a context of increased marketisation in higher education in which students may be more likely to perceive themselves as consumers.

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## **Introduction**

This study critically examines the value of a university-based staff-student shadowing scheme, as perceived by eleven staff participants. The perceived value is situated within an exploration of issues of ethics and power relations arising from the application of a limited form of corporate ethnography to a higher education context, when both researcher and participants are insiders. The staff-student shadowing scheme, at the University of Winchester, was piloted and evaluated during 2010-11 (Appendix I). The University, originally founded as a Diocesan Training School in 1840 for the training of elementary schoolmasters, is in central southern England. During the 1970s and 80s the institution, at that time known as King Alfred's College, expanded its curriculum into a range of disciplines spanning arts, humanities and social sciences. It was awarded University title in 2005, with research degree awarding powers following in 2008. In 2011 the University had approximately seven hundred staff and a total student population of around seven thousand.

The decision to establish a staff-student shadowing scheme was taken by the University's Senior Management Team, having read about a similar scheme operating at London South Bank University which had been shortlisted for a Times Higher Award in the category of *leadership development*. Thus it was decided by the Vice Chancellor that it was appropriate for me, in my role as Director of Staff Development, to develop the scheme at Winchester as a pilot in 2010-11. However, as I also have responsibility for widening participation strategy I have a strong interest in the student experience. Marrying the interests of staff development with the potential offered by the scheme for enhancing student experience was therefore an attractive proposition.

The aims of the scheme were to increase staff understanding of the daily experience of students and through this to suggest ways in which students' experience could be enhanced, for example through improvements to services, systems or facilities. Thus the scheme could in theory serve the dual purposes of staff development and quality enhancement. The need to focus on student satisfaction significantly increased after the Government decided to largely replace direct funding of higher education in England with substantially higher

tuition fees for students from 2012 onwards. Although universities have not received a real increase in funding, students are now constituted as 'paying customers', seeking best value for money as crudely characterised by student satisfaction league tables. The need to understand drivers of student satisfaction and dissatisfaction is therefore of importance to all universities and Winchester's senior management team identified staff-student shadowing as a vehicle which could complement existing forms of staff development and student feedback.

Following the pilot the Senior Management Team, most of whom had participated, decided the scheme should continue in 2011-12 and this research study focuses on the full roll-out of the scheme in that academic year. Participant shadowers were drawn from a range of academic and professional services roles across the University, with differing levels of seniority. My own role in terms of seniority sits below the rank of Deans and most Directors, but I report directly to the Senior Management Team. I was therefore less senior than most participants in the scheme. Student participants were volunteers and represented a variety of programmes and years of study.

The University of Winchester's corporate ethos is values-based and closely related to its Anglican foundation. The University has published a Values Leaflet which states

*We value freedom, justice, truth, human rights and collective effort for the public good. The plans and actions of the University of Winchester are founded in these ideals together with the following values: intellectual freedom, social justice, diversity, spirituality, individuals matter, creativity.*

[http://issuu.com/theuniversityofwinchester/docs/winchester\\_values\\_leaflet?mode=window&backgroundcolor=%23222222](http://issuu.com/theuniversityofwinchester/docs/winchester_values_leaflet?mode=window&backgroundcolor=%23222222)

The leaflet describes the importance to the University of the opinions of individuals and quotes a member of staff, who says *"The University is small, friendly and has a 'human face' - I feel I can have more of an effect as an individual."* As a small values-led institution, therefore, a staff-student shadowing scheme would seem to fit with the overall ethos of the University which emphasizes its small scale and apparently close relationships between all members of its community, including those between staff and students.

However, the scheme could also play a part in revealing whether the published values and assumed characteristics of the University are in reality mythologies, with the possibility that staff participants could be surprised by how little they really 'know' students and what it is like to be a student.

My interest in researching the scheme was sparked partly by its novelty and therefore the paucity of literature on the application of shadowing in a higher education setting. Although Winchester was not the first university to establish such a scheme, I judged that by implementing staff-student shadowing in tandem with an action research project I could assist the University in evaluating its value and also benefit those in other universities who might consider setting up a similar scheme in future. I was unclear in my own mind about whether the scheme was genuinely a form of staff development, or whether it was just a different way of eliciting feedback from students in order to contribute to quality monitoring and enhancement. Building on findings from research into the pilot scheme run in 2010-11, the study examines whether staff participants changed their perspectives on the daily experience of students and, as a result, whether the experience led to self-development, increased insights or more tangible outcomes in terms of quality enhancement or ways in which staff carry out their roles. The investigation surveyed all participants (staff and students) by means of on-line questionnaires, though student surveys were brief in order not to intrude too much on their time and to maintain the focus of my research on staff participants. Staff participants were also interviewed several weeks after the shadowing, using a semi-structured form, to obtain richer, more reflective data. In addition I participated as a 'shadower' myself, reflecting on the experience subjectively.

My research interests lay not just in evaluating, through action research, the issues, benefits and practical outcomes of the scheme. I was also interested in using ethnographical methods to critically appraise whether perceptions of the value of the scheme related to the role and seniority of participants, with a particular focus on how power relations threaded through the process and affected whose needs were seen to be served and how. In adopting this approach I hoped to uncover different meanings of 'value' held by different



participants and to reveal how these meanings influenced participants' opinions about which categories of staff would gain most from undertaking shadowing.

Ethical, methodological and micro-political tensions arose from the operation of the scheme itself and the associated research, including issues relating to professional relationships, confidentiality and consent. These I explore and discuss with reference to Foucault's writings on discipline, surveillance and power, allowing a critical assessment of whether this limited form of 'corporate ethnography' is appropriate in a higher education context. During the pilot criticism was voiced by some staff that too much weight could be put on idiosyncratic findings from shadowing a small number of students. I therefore probe this dimension in more depth to examine whether the focus on individual experiences could be viewed as a strength rather than a problem.

In essence the scheme has potential for a dual role in contributing to staff development and in bringing about quality enhancement. Outcomes might be related to individuals' own career/personal development or to improvements in how they carry out their role. The study explores perceived benefits and issues from participants' perspectives and also critiques the shadowing method itself, aiming to contribute to the sparse literature in this area (McDonald, 2005: p. 470). However, the more significant contribution of the study is its exploration of the '*power and interests of relevant stakeholders*' (Brannick and Coghlan, 2007: p. 71). These include tensions arising from a senior management-initiated scheme which could be perceived in conflicting ways by individual participants of varying seniority, and which had potential to be viewed by some staff as a covert method of exerting managerial power and discipline through 'spying'.

The key research questions which this study therefore seeks to address are:

- What were the staff-student shadowing scheme's outcomes and perceived value?
- To what extent were outcomes dependent upon relations of power and status, including those between staff and students in the context of growing marketisation of higher education?
- Whose needs did the scheme serve and how?

- What ethical, methodological and micro-political issues emerged in running the shadowing scheme?
- How appropriate is the application of this limited form of 'corporate ethnography' in the context of a higher education institution?

In the context of neoliberalism and growing managerialism in higher education, the role of staff in discerning how students engage with the university, and in identifying and responding to students' needs in the widest sense, becomes paramount in the eyes of institutional managers, not just in terms of ensuring and enhancing student satisfaction, but also in securing competitive advantage. Krause and Coates contend that gathering data about what students are doing has *'the potential to inform understanding of many aspects of university life, such as student affairs, pedagogical quality, recruitment and selection, attrition and retention, equity, and student learning processes'* (2008: p. 495). The introduction of a staff-student shadowing scheme could therefore be one approach to developing staff insights into students' experiences in order to generate new ways of understanding and responding to their needs. From a Foucaultian perspective, this moulding and disciplining of behaviours could be seen as a strategy to create docile, compliant staff, better suited to serving the demands of a neo-liberal market in higher education.

## **Chapter One**

### **Student Satisfaction and the Neo-Liberal University**

This chapter outlines the effects of marketisation of the higher education sector in a context in which the burden of funding universities has largely passed to students through increased tuition fees, albeit paid 'upfront' by the Government as a tuition fee loan. It examines the growing conceptualisation of students as consumers and the concurrent political drive to increase competition in the higher education sector by providing comparable data about student experience in individual institutions, as reported by students themselves, so that students can make informed choices in their selection of universities and programmes of study. An argument is made for the growing importance of institutional self-knowledge to understand and respond to students' needs against a backdrop of external auditing and surveillance.

From the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century there has been an accelerating shift towards marketisation of higher education (Newman and Jahdi, 2009; Ng and Forbes, 2009; Molesworth et al, 2009). This new paradigm has been embraced by popular media, positioning students as consumers and indicating a shift in the balance of power, from university managers and academics deciding what students should do and experience, towards students exercising choice and having more say on their entitlements as they pay higher fees and incur more debt (The Times, 17 August 2011; Daily Telegraph, 15 August 2012; Daily Mail, 3 November 2009).

Many members of the academy are profoundly uneasy with the idea that higher education can be conceptualised as a business, with students viewing a degree as a commodity to be bought, or identifying level of fees as a signifier of quality (Bell et al, 2009; Gibbs, 2011; Gross and Hogler, 2005; Naidoo and Jamieson, 2005). There has been reluctance across the sector to apply conventional marketing principles, with managers and academics believing this would be at the cost of pedagogical aims (Bowden, 2011). Nevertheless, the growing influence of market forces and neo-liberal economic policy, as they impact on higher education, have forced universities to engage more closely with students

and take seriously their judgements on the quality of experience afforded to them from the point of application, throughout their programmes of study and in terms of post-graduation employment prospects. In an attempt to increase competition across the sector and 'deliver' value for money Government policy has introduced mechanisms such as the National Student Survey (NSS), which publicly expose assessments made by students about the quality of learning and teaching and services offered by the institutions in which they study. More recently Key Information Sets have been introduced by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) which *'give prospective students access to robust, reliable and comparable information in order to help them make informed decisions about what and where to study'* (HEFCE, July 2012: web). These contain data drawn from a range of sources (including the NSS) and cover an array of experiences including learning and teaching, assessment, fees and financial support, accommodation and graduate destinations. The idea is to *'create well-informed students able to drive improvement by demanding better service'* (Little and Williams, 2010: p. 117).

'Student experience' currently has a high political profile (Ertl and Wright, 2008). The introduction of 'upfront' tuition fees in higher education in 1998, followed by higher deferred fees in 2006 and significantly increased fees in 2012, has centred attention on value for money and the quality of students' experience at university. However, it is important to note that, from an institutional perspective, tuition fee income has now largely replaced funding which was previously granted to universities by the Government via the Higher Education Funding Council. Nevertheless a general perception persists that students should expect higher quality as a result of their own increased financial commitment to funding higher education.

Interest in the quality of the student experience is not such a recent phenomenon however. Tight (2009) notes that the Robbins Report of 1963 triggered greater efforts to discern students' experience of teaching and learning, while others such as Lewis argue that students have had high expectations for *'at least a generation'* (1984: p. 168) not just in the domain of excellence in teaching and learning, but also in relation to personal and vocational concerns (Lewis and Vulliamy, 1981). However, these expectations

are evolving as diversity of the student body - in terms of educational, economic and cultural backgrounds - has increased and universities face pressure to adapt to changing needs (Little and Williams, 2010).

The launch of the first full National Student Survey (NSS) in 2005 intensified the need for universities to pay attention to student satisfaction. Results from the survey, which is sent to final year undergraduates at all directly funded higher education institutions in England, Wales, Northern Ireland, and the majority of Higher Education Institutions in Scotland, are intended to

*'help inform prospective students and their advisers, alongside other information on teaching quality, in making choices about what and where to study. It also aims to contribute to public accountability, and to provide information that will help institutions to enhance teaching quality, by supplementing internal feedback mechanisms'* (HEFCE, 2004: p. 1)

In the 2012 survey students were questioned about teaching, assessment, support, organisation and management, learning resources, personal development, overall satisfaction and their Students' Union (Ipsos Mori, 2012). However, it has been argued by some that it is in students' interests to rate levels of satisfaction with their institution more highly than they would otherwise in order to help push the university up the league table and increase the perceived value of their degree (Bell et al, 2009). Key Information Sets, introduced by HEFCE in 2012, draw together information from the NSS and a range of other sources to provide a plethora of information for prospective students when making their choice of university. Universities are set in competition against each other to recruit high-calibre students, particularly in relation to those in the unrestricted pool of high-fliers who are above the cap imposed on each university's student number control, so information publicly available about student satisfaction levels is of crucial importance to institutions in marketing terms.

The power held by students in making public judgements about satisfaction with the quality of their university experience has contributed to a changing discourse, with students now increasingly reframed as agents who are able to influence improvements to higher education through consumer power (Tlili and

Wright, 2005). As Rotfeld states *'once students are told to see themselves as customers for education degrees, they expect customer service with a smile'* (1999: p. 416). Little and Williams (2010) list the range of ways in which students are playing a central role, not only at institutional level but also in terms of national developments. These include forms in which individual students can make their anonymous voices heard, for example by participation in the National Student Survey and internal institutional surveys, and other forms in which students have a collective voice, for example by representation on university committees and governing bodies, membership of institutional audit teams and representation on national student bodies which have influence on HE policy-makers. All of these means of seeking out students' opinions have a potential role to play in informing student choices of university and programmes of study.

Newman and Jahdi argue that judgements made by students are fed by their strengthened sense of their rights and expectations *'With students having 'bought' the course through tuition fees, the marketisation agenda thus impacts on student satisfaction, closely related to whether student expectations are met ...'* (2009: p. 8). At the same time complaints mechanisms have become more transparent and institutionalized (Naidoo and Jamieson, 2005), causing universities not only to ensure an audit trail is in place showing responses to concerns raised and remedies implemented, but also to proactively encourage students to complain and make suggestions for improvement. Ng and Forbes (2009) contend that this customer-focused marketing orientation in higher education is justifiable in the context of satisfying student expectations and securing competitive advantage.

In opposition to this stance, the emergent discourse of higher education as provider of services to consumers (students), is situated by a range of authors within the anti-state and pro-market political model of *'neoliberal managerialism'* (Deem and Reed, 2007; Clegg and David, 2006; Naidoo and Jamieson, 2005). This, they argue, began to develop from the late 1970s as

*... a form of 'market populism' in which free markets and private business enterprise were regarded as universal and infallible solutions to the governmental and organizational problems that continued to beset advanced capitalist societies* (Deem and Reed, 2007: pp. 8-9).

Deem and Reed further argue that since the late 1990s a new form of '*neo-technocratic managerialism*' (2007: p. 10) has transferred power from 'providers' into the hands of 'users' who are thus empowered to monitor and evaluate quality of service. This can be seen as part of a movement towards personalisation in which '*services will be improved by putting users at the centre of any given service and understanding and acting on their needs*' (Little and Williams, 2010: p. 116). To assist 'users' in this role, governments have established new forms of intrusive auditing and inspection requiring public sector bodies, including universities, to measure their own performance under public scrutiny and become more accountable in order to justify allocation of public funds, thus eroding professional autonomy and power (Ng and Forbes, 2009). McGrath describes this as '*a culture of surveillance and accountability in higher education that influences how managers and leaders apply the micro level theories of management and leadership that have been imported from the public sector*' (in Newman and Jahdi, 2003: p. 20). Barnett contends that this '*state apparatus of quality*' (2003: p. 93) constrains higher education, intruding into learning and teaching and therefore being '*counter to any emancipatory hope of higher education*' (2003: p. 97). The ideal of continuous improvement implicit in QAA frameworks is held to be '*metaphysical*' and '*impossible to reach*' by Gibbs (2011: p. 141).

The notion of higher education as a 'service industry' is further critiqued by Birnbaum (2001), who argues that students are becoming more utilitarian in their approach. This is not least because they desire to see a return on their financial investment in tuition fees in terms of increased employability (Clegg and David, 2006). The re-casting of students (and public service users in general) as consumers in an era of economic austerity and shrinking public funding can be argued to have transformed professionals employed in the public sector into 'servants' who no longer have the power to define what is offered.

*Public services professionals can no longer be trusted, if they ever could, to speak for 'the customer' in an era when market competition becomes the universal principle and mechanism through which resource allocation and utilization are to be organized, evaluated, and justified* (Deem et al, 2007: p. 31).

Molesworth et al in their conceptualisation of the '*neo-liberal university*' contend that '*HE has adopted with increasing vigour, an orientation that has reduced a degree to an outlay that appears to secure future material affluence rather than as an investment in the self*' (2009: p. 280). In similar vein, drawing on the work of Gumpert (2000), Birnbaum puts the case that higher education can no longer be viewed as a social institution with a social justice mission when the current discourse is one of '*economic utility, consumerism and technology*' (2001: p. 226). Tight describes this as '*a rational response to the demands of providing mass higher education to an increasingly consumer-oriented clientele*' (2009: p. 315). This critique is shared by others such as Evans (2004) and by Mills (2007), who also points to the challenges involved in maintaining academic standards at the same time as student satisfaction. Hemsley-Brown (2011), citing McMurtry (1991), points out that there is no real parallel between a marketplace, where goods and services can be bought, and education, where goods have to be earned through effort. Furthermore, she argues that in a marketplace the most desirable product is one which is most problem-free for the consumer, whereas in higher education the '*product*' is not ready-made and the process of learning is one of grappling with difficult problems. In Ramsden's view '*... students do not have a 'right' to be satisfied. They are themselves part of the experience ...*' (2007: p. 5). This is echoed by Ng and Forbes who argue that students' expectations should relate to their own self-deliverables and efforts, not just those of the institution, leading them to develop the concept of an ideological gap '*between designing the service toward fulfilling students' expectations and designing the service toward what the institution believes the students should experience*' (2009: p. 54). They further contend that '*...universities can influence students into what they think students should value in a university experience*' (2009: p. 56).

A focus on student engagement and feedback has become ever more critical since the introduction of tuition fees and proliferation of competitive league tables comparing higher education institutions in a multitude of different ways. Furthermore, when viewed through a marketing lens, students' consumer identities can be conceptualised in a range of ways. Citing Yang, Alessandri and Kinsey (2008), Bowden (2011) describes students as internal stakeholders, consumers of educational products and services, suppliers of economic



resources and donors of alumni networks. The need, therefore, to 'satisfy' students has an economic imperative as it is argued that positive recommendations from students to others may lead to increased revenue, students may themselves continue at the institution by undertaking post-graduate study, and once in employment they may contribute voluntary donations (Bowden, 2011). Although there are multiple voices of dissent about the commodification of higher education (Ramsden, 2007; Mann, 2008; Newman and Jahdi, 2009; Deem et al, 2007) it is nevertheless reluctantly recognised that seeking value-for-money, as crudely defined by league tables, has become a priority for many students (and their parents) in making judgements about the worth of university experience, or as Watson puts it, higher education is experiencing 'a *value-for-money backlash*' (2011: p. 17).

While universities are required as a condition of public funding to supply data in prescribed forms, the need to look inwards and uncover what drives the judgements students make about their experience and report in the NSS, has become paramount. Standardised survey instruments are now in routine use across higher education, but Watson and Maddison point to the need to avoid '*the pseudo-scientism of management by spreadsheet*' (2005: p. 17), especially when this is to satisfy the demands of external audiences. The validity of results from student satisfaction surveys is questionable, therefore raising issues of reliability when used as the basis for management decisions relating to quality enhancement. For example, Cheng and Marsh's research review concluded that such surveys were ineffective at differentiating between classes, courses or departments and that the National Student Survey reveals '*substantial lack of agreement*' (2010: p. 706) between students within each university. Satisfaction surveys are lagging indicators which draw upon retrospective assessments, but the need is increasingly to identify good and bad practice as it occurs in order to address problems and share solutions in a process of continuous improvement, thus feeding into future survey results. The opportunities for institutional intelligence to contribute to success, and indeed survival, of universities are clear (Longden and Yorke, 2009).

'Student engagement' is a concept which has become formalised within higher education quality processes. While its meaning can relate to active engagement

of students with their learning, within the Quality Assurance Agency's UK Quality Code of Practice its primary meaning is '*the participation of students in quality enhancement and quality assurance processes, resulting in the improvement of their educational experience*' (2012, Chapter 5, p. 2). The Code notes that this should include gathering individual and collective feedback from students, a process which could be characterized as a form of institutional research.

Institutional research is defined by Rourke and Brooks as '*a variegated form of organizational self-study designed to help colleges and universities gather an expanding range of information about their own internal operations and the effectiveness with which they are using their resources*' (1966: p. 44).

Furthermore, Watson and Maddison (2005) point to the role of institutional self-study as an instrument of strategic management in improving the competitive position of universities. However, in Brown's view institutional research in higher education in the UK, other than standardised questionnaire surveys, is relatively undeveloped.

*One of the many paradoxes of UK higher education is that as the sector moves into an era of market competition and student consumerism, universities and colleges are still operating without the information and understanding of their 'customers', 'product' and 'production function' that any commercial business, even a bank, would regard as absolutely basic* (Brown, 2009: p. 61).

The importance of gathering research intelligence about student experience in its widest sense, not just in learning and teaching, is emphasized by a number of authors (Ertl and Wright, 2008; Edwards and Usher, 2000; Ainley, 2008). Ertl and Wright stress the need for more holistic studies '*linking academic learning with other aspects of student life*' (2008: p. 207), rather than drawing evidence solely from standardised feedback instruments. Similarly, research which focuses on teaching and learning in higher education often fails to explore human relationships, or the context in which learning takes place (Ashwin, 2009; Edwards and Usher, 2000), thus marginalising these key aspects of student experience. A student shadowing scheme which engages staff who are in managerial or professional roles, rather than 'front-line' teaching, therefore has potential to generate wider institutional understanding of students' experiences and to give participants helpful insights into ways in which they might apply this.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Staff Development and Power Relations in Universities**

This chapter explores the nature of staff development in universities from a Foucaultian perspective. The role of consumerisation and centrality of student satisfaction in shaping quality regimes and managerial approaches to staff development is examined, together with the part that collaborative inquiry and reflection through a process such as shadowing might play in bringing about the dual processes of staff development and quality enhancement.

Staff development may be defined in a multitude of ways. In simple terms, it is a way of supporting staff '*both personally and professionally, in achieving their own and their institutional needs...*' (Parker, 2003: p. 36). While acknowledging that it can mean '*anything and everything*', McCaffery describes staff development as '*a different state of being or functioning*' (2004: p. 178) through undertaking formal qualifications, training or informal learning experiences. He contends that in universities a broad range of approaches may be adopted including institution-wide comprehensive strategies, problem-centred approaches focused on more immediate needs and business-led models oriented towards meeting operational and environmental challenges. Taking a highly critical stance, McWilliam (2002) portrays standard forms of staff development in universities as usually involving didactic workshops, with development predicated on the idea that those running the workshops have more knowledge than those 'being developed', the intended outcomes often being to protect against litigation or to improve efficiency. She argues that professional development is a flawed concept, with outcomes most often measured and documented simply by levels of attendance.

Universities are large, complex organisations with many different functions including not only research and teaching but also community engagement, consultancy, conference business, housing, catering, estates management – to name but a few. This complexity requires staff with a broad range of specialist skills and knowledge, leading in most universities to a devolved form of management with local planning and budgeting carried out within Faculties and

Departments. Whitchurch argues that devolved institutional structures have led to the creation of professional roles which are concerned with producing and managing knowledge, including intelligence about students and other understandings which *'will inform the evolution of institutional identities'* (2006: p. 4). This, she believes, creates a need for staff appointed in these types of positions to have development opportunities by contributing to projects which enable them to cross functional boundaries and extend their practice (Whitchurch, 2009). Boland and Tenkasi's work affirms this view, as they stress the importance within complex organisational environments of *'distributed cognition'* (1995: p. 351) and the need to be able to adopt other people's perspectives. The web of devolved responsibilities and roles created through the evolution of universities' functions suggests a need for new forms of personal and staff development.

Staff development can be viewed through a Foucaultian lens. From this perspective professional development may be seen as a way of shaping the subjectivity of employees – bringing them in line with the aims of their employing institution (Usher and Solomon, 1999). Indeed the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development defines career development as *'Planning and shaping the progression or movement of individuals within an organisation by aligning employee preferences and potential with organisational resourcing needs'* (2003: web). Nicoll and Harrison (2003) describe this as a non-coercive form of discipline, echoing Ball's characterization of self-improvement which *'is achieved by the improvement of selves, by making people aware of their weaknesses and getting them to commit themselves to methods of redemption'* (1990: p. 162). In this sense it could be argued that through participating in institution-led staff development employees become 'docile bodies' constituted through the operation of 'micro-technologies' (Foucault, 1979) which *'facilitate constant forms of surveillance and the operation of evaluation and judgment'* (Hoskin, 1990: p. 31). These micro-technologies include the engagement of staff in forms of professional development which encourage reflection on practice – what Foucault (1979) might define as a confessional technology of the self. Reflection can enable individuals to understand their own perceptions and the meanings they and others construct in relation to events (Price, 2004). However, reflection is bounded by dominant

discourses and what is commonly agreed to be truth and rationality, leading McWilliam to describe professional development as '*a discursively organised domain whose practices are neither innocent nor neutral*' (2002: p. 289).

Behaviours, roles and understandings of the self are subject to the discipline of power relations embedded in institutions and bodies of knowledge to which we constantly refer (Danaher et al, 2000). Thus the prevalent discourse of student-as-consumer may lead to forms of staff development which engender a 'service' mentality, with a focus on learning how to enhance the student experience, rather than encouraging reflection which allows the consumerist approach to be challenged. Mitchell (2009) draws on Foucault to further argue that discourse will include which concepts of inquiry are considered to be valid – and one could extend this to encompass what forms of staff development may be sanctioned.

As a management technique, therefore, staff development can be construed as a '*practical technology of rationality geared to efficiency, practicality and control*' (Ball, 1990: p. 157). Although new knowledge may be generated through the process of self-development, it is bounded and constrained by power relations embedded both within dominant discourses and in the needs of those who manage the organisation and control flows of communication. Knowledge other than that which fits into 'regimes of truth' (Foucault, 1980) may be excluded and ignored, for knowledge '*is socially sustained and invested with interests and backed by power*' (Barnett, 1997: p. 5).

Pursuing a Foucaultian analysis, in which power is seen to be embedded in all social relations and practices, Gross and Hogler (2005) assert that individuals are restricted by institutions and power relations in the degree to which they can exercise free agency. Individuals must submit themselves to the wider discourse, interiorising its powerful demands and constituting themselves as its agents. When coupled with the notion that training and learning processes are predominantly institutionalized, this can lead to maintenance of the status quo rather than bringing about change in individuals' states of being (Roan and Rooney, 2006). This view may concur with that of Parker (2003) who is sceptical about the role staff development has played in the transformation of higher education to a mass system.

Even when individuals undertake professional or work-based learning and development it can be very difficult to integrate and apply the learning due to the pace of change and busy schedule of activities in the workplace (Rhodes and Shiel, 2007). From this perspective it may not necessarily be the case that reflective practice and the generation of creative thinking will lead to change. In the context of consumerisation of higher education students can exert force on universities to concede to their demands, thus *'In the end, educational bureaucrats institute regimes of control ... in response to the external signs and signals emanating from the consumer marketplace'* (Gross and Hogler, 2005: p. 12). In this way creative solutions generated through action research, and new thinking engendered through professional development, may be stifled if they are not in line with students' desires or the prevailing dominant discourses of marketisation and managerialism in higher education's *'field of power relations'* (Foucault, 1991: p. 247).

It is important not to over-play the degree to which students exercise power, for as Becker et al (1968) found in their study of student experience they are still subject to regulatory regimes in terms of academic matters. Indeed, the apparatus of teaching, assessment and course organisation divides students, as the 'managed', from the institution as manager/controller, through a *'surveillance function'* (Mann, 2008: p. 85). Nevertheless there are currently very strong signals from Government that they aim to give students more power, for as stated in the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills White Paper *'We will introduce a risk-based quality regime that focuses regulatory effort where it will have most impact and gives power to students to hold universities to account'* (2011: p. 10). In light of this HEFCE stated in their consultation on the new approach to quality assurance *'We will ensure that students continue to play a prominent role in assessing their own academic experiences'* (2012: p. 2) and *'The aim of the proposed approach is to put the interests of students first'* (2012: p. 5). From a Foucaultian stance one could therefore argue that students have been constituted as *'powerful subjects'* (Ball, 1990: p. 5), with the role of previously autonomous, controlling, higher education professionals now being to deliver their demands rather than to define *'the limits of the possible'*, (Deem, 2007: p. 11). Staff development, from this perspective, would be led by student needs, with the desired outcome being better 'service provision'.

However, it is also possible to draw on Foucault's ideas to argue that increased knowledge about students as subjects will yield greater power to those who have acquired additional insights, giving them increased legitimacy when formulating policies and plans. Although knowledge is directed, voices heard and power yielded, in ways which relate to people's positions in a hierarchy (Roan and Rooney, 2006; Mills, 2003), Foucault asserts that power relations exist as a network, with power contested and negotiated at different levels permeating upwards as well as top-down, creating the possibility for individuals to become active subjects rather than passive recipients of control and direction (Mills, 2003). Within an institution understandings of truth can be modified as members resist becoming 'docile' and instead collectively create shared agreements about values, norms and behaviours (Barker, 1993). Collective self-monitoring and reflection according to these agreed norms may, in Barnett's (1997) view, be emancipatory, creating new possibilities for action which may thwart the dominant discourse (Foucault, 1978a). However, as Barnett (2003) points out, the quality regime in higher education runs counter to the hope of emancipation. The self-gaze of university staff is instead constrained by parameters of quality assurance, student satisfaction and university league tables. As government policy, enacted through regulatory authorities, ever more closely aligns definitions of quality with levels of student satisfaction, the perceived need to focus on developing staff in order to enhance student experience becomes increasingly compelling.

The disciplinary power of self-reflection is perhaps at its strongest when employed through the process of experiential learning. This is a method of garnering knowledge, understanding and skills through reflection on practice or experience and is identified as a key method of development by many professional bodies, including the Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development. Documentation of experiential learning is also well established in higher education as a method of entry to degree programmes for those who are not otherwise qualified by virtue of formal qualifications. Moon describes experiential learning as *'the organizing and construction of learning from observations that have been made in some practical situation, with the*

*implication that the learning can then lead to action (or improved action)'* (1999: p. 20).

One form of experiential learning is action science (Argyris and Schon, 1996). This brings together a group to undertake collaborative inquiry in order to identify their own perceptions of reality and to find ways of challenging ineffectiveness through theory-building and testing (Friedman, 2006). Successful action research or 'inquiry-in-action' can be small-scale, ranging from first person action research to collaborative research with other practitioners inquiring into issues of mutual concern in order to produce practical outcomes (Reason and Bradbury, 2006). Collective critical reflection and institutional self-study are considered to be integral components of a learning organisation (Barnett, 1997; Watson and Maddison, 2005). While there are some similarities, it is of limited plausibility to argue that a staff-student shadowing scheme could be characterized as a form of collaborative inquiry or collective reflection, since staff participate in shadowing as individuals, reflecting on what they have experienced themselves rather than undertaking co-ordinated research to build and test theory. However, a shadowing scheme has potential to be an effective form of development for those taking part, for not only could the scheme have practical outcomes in the sense of bringing about change to systems or processes (quality enhancement), but the process of undertaking inquiry through shadowing should in itself lead to learning (self-development). In this sense it is an opportunity to engage in a form of participatory research leading to research-informed practice, something which is less usual for those staff who are not in academic roles. The shadowing scheme would seem to fit loosely with Reason and Bradbury's definition of '*second person action research/practice*'. This they explain as '*our ability to inquire face-to-face with others into issues of mutual concern – for example in the service of improving our personal and professional practice both individually and separately*' (2006: p. xxv). In the context of the current discourse which gives greater power to the 'student voice' in shaping the nature of their university experience, one could argue that there is a mutuality of concern between staff and students to enhance that experience. Hence the shadowing scheme brings staff face-to-face with students to inquire into their daily reality.



## **Chapter Three**

### **The Staff-Student Shadowing Scheme and Research Project**

This chapter outlines the range of ways in which shadowing, as a technique, operates in different settings and for different purposes, drawing on McDonald's (2005) typology. Comparisons are drawn with quasi-anthropological and ethnographic methods applied as a form of insider research in the corporate world. The staff-student shadowing scheme at Winchester is compared with that at the University of Exeter. The purposes and possible outcomes of staff-student shadowing are considered, including those relating to quality enhancement, marketing, communication and staff development. The aims of the research study into the University of Winchester shadowing scheme are then described.

#### **3.1 The Shadowing Scheme**

It was principally in recognition of the need to understand students' experience in a more rounded way that the University decided to introduce a staff-student shadowing scheme. The original idea had been sourced from London South Bank University, who had introduced a scheme in 2009. The purpose of the LSBU scheme was to

*...gain insights into the everyday issues students face, to find out what is important to them and what actions can be taken to improve their experience while studying at the University*

<http://www.lsbu.ac.uk/news-php/news.php?newsid=578> (accessed 24.3.11).

This innovation seemed to offer a novel, practical method which could be replicated and tailored to the University of Winchester without significant cost or resources. Furthermore, it would allow students' experiences to be investigated and situated in the wider context of the University as a whole, including social and non-timetabled elements, rather than at the level of the programme/course which is the focus of the National Student Survey. In

McDonald's view shadowing is a methodological approach which can offer this type of framework

*Any enquiry where the unit of analysis is not just the individual, but also the network of activity and relationships, or organizational context that surrounds them would also benefit from the use of this data-generation method* (McDonald, 2005: p. 469).

My belief was that constituting the implementation of the shadowing scheme as action research would provide underpinning attention to ethics, analysis of costs and benefits and a focus on what participants felt were the pragmatic outcomes, both for the University and for them as individuals. To this end the scheme would not be introduced for the sake of novelty, but would concur with Birnbaum's conceptualisation of pragmatic management in which the primary goal '*is not to implement the innovation; it is to help make the institution better*' (2001: p. 235).

There has been growth in the use of shadowing as a technique to understand consumer behaviour – situated within a context of what is sometimes termed commercial ethnography (Gobo, 2008: p. 3). This movement reflects debates within the field of anthropology, where some view the appropriation of anthropological and ethnographical approaches to serve corporate interests as a threat to the purity of the discipline, as discussed in Ehn and Lofgren (2009). Others see the growing use of ethnography in organisations as '*a longstanding promise of anthropology as a discipline that provides uniquely intimate access to relevant others*' (Suchman, 2000: p. 1). As Pink (2006) and Roberts (2006) point out, anthropological and ethnographic methods have gained currency across a range of sectors including commercial, public services and government departments.

McDonald (2005) identifies three types of shadowing. The first type is undertaken by the shadower in order to learn, characterized by Meunier and Vasquez (2008) as experiential learning. Generally shadowing has been most often used in terms of job-shadowing - for those early in their careers or aspiring to more senior roles, for young people choosing careers, for those undergoing training who need to see how specific skills are applied by those who are already members of a profession, or for professionals shadowing each other in order to

share good practice. Job-shadowing is therefore a form of individual professional development (McCaffery, 2004). In job- or work-shadowing contexts '*A shadow will accompany an experienced host or team in their everyday work, observe them, and accustom themselves with the content of their working day, skills and methods of decision making and leadership*' (New South Wales Department of Education and Training, 2009: p.4). Bartkowiak-Theron and Sappey (2012) note that this type of shadowing is passive, with possibilities for probing or scrutiny limited by unequal power relations between practitioners and their shadowers.

The second type identified by McDonald is '*to record behaviour with a view to discovering patterns in it*' (2005: p. 461). According to Meunier and Vasquez (2008) this is most frequently used in management research and includes more systematic gathering of data, often using activity logs and recording tasks in a more objectivist way. This type of shadowing is more likely to be targeted at improving efficiency or organisational effectiveness through modifying activity to match customer needs.

The aim of the third type of shadowing is to '*investigate roles and perspectives in a detailed, qualitative way*' (McDonald, 2005: p. 461) and is subjectivist in nature (Meunier and Vasquez, 2008; Vasquez, 2012), allowing interpretation of events and actions while they are occurring from the viewpoint of the person being shadowed. Shadowing, when used in qualitative research, is defined by Bartkowiak-Theron and Sappey as a method which '*allows researchers to gain first-hand insight into how functions are fulfilled in a given group in society or perhaps at the level of day-to-day operations and logistics of a particular role*' (2012: p. 7). My contention is that staff-student shadowing schemes most closely fit this third category of shadowing, particularly when shadowing observations are combined with informal discussion between partners, teasing out richer contextual data and meanings.

Although not well defined in the literature (McDonald, 2005), shadowing is different from structured observation, although clearly the managerial form of shadowing identified by Meunier and Vasquez (2008) has similarities and overlaps. Shadowing is more intrusive in nature than structured observation and

there is no attempt to keep at a distance from the person being shadowed (Meunier and Vasquez, 2008). In addition to observing, the shadower asks questions through informal discussion in response to incidents and events as they occur, or soon after, requiring the shadower to obtain '*first-hand information, comments, understanding and interpretation from the person being shadowed*' (Bartkowiak-Theron and Sappey, 2012: p. 8). The learning which emerges is gained in an inductive, flexible way, providing a '*rich, dense and comprehensive data set which gives a detailed, first-hand and multidimensional picture...*' (McDonald, 2005: p. 457), including routines and daily activities which might otherwise be seen as insignificant and therefore not surfaced by more conventional forms of research such as surveys. The method also provides 'real time' data, constituted contextually (Vasquez, 2012), rather than reconstructions of past events (Quinlan, 2008). Boland and Tenkasi (1995) refer to this type of process as perspective taking, as the shadower gains insights through the eyes of another while they are immersed in their social environment and institutional context.

There is growing evidence of 'customer' or 'client' shadowing, for example in health settings (DiGioia, 2010, Royal Dental Hospital, Melbourne, 2008; University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, 2008; Vukic and Keddy, 2002), museums (MacDonald, 2001), schools (Hirsh, 1999; New South Wales Department of Education and Training, 2009, Lai, 1999) and corporations (Snyder and Glueck, 1980). The Center for Action Inquiry and Motivation (AIM Center Seattle), a partnership between the University of Washington and local schools, has developed a scheme in which educators shadow students in their own schools or others. Their website ([www.aimcenterseattle.org](http://www.aimcenterseattle.org)) cites a range of benefits derived from the scheme including increased understanding of interactions between students and teachers, instructional and curricular practices, support for students, and ideas for improvement. The scheme appears to be flexible with educators designing their shadowing to meet their own aims and objectives.

Until recently the technique does not appear to have been used widely in higher education (or perhaps not researched and reported). Its most prevalent use has been in allowing young people who are considering applying to study at a

particular university to shadow students, following them for anything up to a day, accompanying them to lectures and touring the campus. A typical example of this form of shadowing is offered by the London School of Economics and outlined in their 2012-13 booklet for schools and colleges. As a research method, Montgomery and McDowell (2009) included shadowing as part of a focused study to analyse social networks in a group of international students at Northumbria University.

However in the past 3-4 years, along with LSBU and Winchester, several universities in the UK have introduced staff-student shadowing schemes, including Exeter and Bath who operate 'reciprocal shadowing' schemes in which students and staff shadow each other. The University of Exeter produced a report on their scheme (Zandstra and Dunne, 2012) which was published after my research phase was complete, but while I was in the process of writing it up. This provided useful insights on which to draw while reflecting on my experience of running and researching the scheme at Winchester. Zandstra and Dunne indicate that the scheme had a quality enhancement aim *'The learning from the shadowing experience will support senior managers in making decisions about the student experience'* and *'It was a professional development opportunity for staff'* (2012: p. 2). However, Exeter's report makes limited attempts to provide a theoretical framework for their scheme and the focus is more on how the scheme was operationalised, with an evaluation of how it might be improved in future. The report does not contain in-depth analysis of ethical issues, power relationships or dilemmas encountered by staff participants. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that because the scheme was reciprocal, with students shadowing staff in return, it contained an element of targeting *'certain students who would benefit from the scheme'* (Zandstra and Dunne, 2012: p. 5). This therefore raises questions as to what extent experiences may have been coloured by the selection of certain characteristics amongst those being shadowed.

Published examples indicate that typical client/customer shadowing follows people through processes, systems or experiences in order to get closer to their subjective experience in a naturalistic setting so that need for improvements can be identified and addressed. For example, hospital patients may be shadowed

from arrival in the car park through to treatment (University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, 2008). While the purpose in health and education settings is to identify problems or failures and enhance services, in corporate/quasi-commercial environments improvements resulting from findings may also give a competitive edge in terms of marketing. The 'services marketing mix' (Booms and Bitner, 1981) includes people, process and physical evidence alongside the original 'four P's' of product, price, place and promotion. From this perspective, a staff-student shadowing scheme, by focusing on students' experiences in their learning environments, social activities and university facilities, could theoretically reveal not just areas for improvement or staff development, but also positive aspects which could be celebrated through marketing communications.

Another potential benefit from the scheme could be to strengthen communication between students and staff. As Boland and Tenkasi state '*In any communication, the knowing of what others know is a necessary component for coordinated action to take place*' (1995: p. 358). In one sense it might be argued that students enrol for study in order to 'know what others know', but on the other hand student feedback and communication to staff is vital in order for the institution to understand their perspectives and enable them to become producers as well as consumers of knowledge. Indeed, Bell et al contend that students should '*view the act of giving feedback as part of their responsibility as a member of an academic community*' (2009: p. 125) and there is evidence of students and staff increasingly working in partnership in relation to a broad range of issues (Little and Williams, 2010). This sense of a mutual relationship and affective commitment, in which students are treated as partners, is argued to increase psychological attachment, loyalty and trust (Bowden, 2011). There is a clear connection between these perspectives and that of Meunier and Vasquez's (2008) interpretive view of the nature of organizations. In their view organizations are defined by the agency of their members acting in networks of communication and heterogeneous actions – '*communication is a performance through which organization is accomplished*' (2008: p. 183). They argue that shadowing is a flexible method which allows the complexity of '*communication as action*' (2008: p. 189) to be studied.

Insights gained by staff participants as a direct result of shadowing, or through simply being given 'permission' to talk with students by virtue of being 'matched up' through the scheme, could open possibilities for translating new understanding and knowledge into action. Gibbs argues that an understanding of quality can be reached through '*edifying conversation*' (2011: p. 140). By this he means that instead of viewing quality as determined by market forces and metrics, it can be understood through democratic negotiation, by '*understanding what is considered useful and what is rendered as adequately justified by belief and explanation*' (2011: p. 140). Thus conversation between staff and students based on a shared experience through shadowing could lead to consensus about what constitutes quality. Drawing on the work of Rorty (2002), Gibbs contends that knowledge gained from Socratic conversations can justifiably be seen as truthful and need not be substituted by 'facts' emanating from metrics.

When seen as a means for staff development, student shadowing has potential to become a mechanism for empowering staff to act in the best interests of students, based on real understanding and empathy, at the same time as dispelling mythologies about what students actually do during a typical day. Furthermore, participation by senior management and professional services staff who are more remote from students may create a greater sense of cohesion across the university - not just because they may gain clearer understanding of students' perspectives, but also because the scheme allows these more 'distant' staff to set foot in lecture rooms and experience the work of academic staff first-hand.

Nevertheless, it may be argued that the notion of shadowing affording authentic immersion into students' experience is essentially flawed, as even though the shadower directly participates alongside the student they cannot truly understand and interpret the meaning of the experience for the student (Jackson and Mazzei, 2009). As Mann explains, the '*internal world is shaped by biography, experience and current life situation, and frames the construction of what is significant and meaningful at any one time for the individual in the particular context in which they are in*' (2008: p. 56). For this reason Bartkowiak-Theron and Sappey argue that data gathered through shadowing an individual is personal and therefore difficult to generalise to other individuals or settings,

noting '*the analytical framework therefore needs to caveat generalisability potential*' (2012: p. 11). In addition the short timescale of shadowing in the scheme at Winchester raises questions about what is missed as well as what is experienced (Vasquez, 2012). Nevertheless, a short immersion into the experience of individual students could reveal unique insights which are inaccessible through aggregate feedback derived via systematic methods of student feedback. Furthermore, issues identified may be those which are difficult to capture when asking standardised survey questions or seeking the views of student representatives who speak for many. In a small university, which emphasises the importance of the individual in its published values, first-hand insights into the daily experiences of a few could yield useful information about the needs of students with particular characteristics, studying specific programmes or facing singular problems, which is otherwise hidden.

### **3.2 The Research Project**

The research, involving eleven staff-student shadowing pairs, analyses the extent to which the shadowing scheme mirrors a shift in power relations between managers, staff and students in the context of growing marketisation of higher education and emergent discourse of 'student-as-consumer'. Foucault's writings on discourse and power relations (1977) provide a helpful lens through which to analyse the roles of shadows and shadowers. The discourse of 'student-as-consumer' may be reinforced by putting shadowers in a position where they participate in 'surveillance' of students in order to bring about self-development by better understanding students' needs and how they may be met. The scheme's aim is to induce insights which will help shadowers use their potential agency in bringing about change in systems and processes to increase 'customer' satisfaction. In Foucault's terms, staff participants may 'discipline' themselves to comply with new power relations which have been constructed through shifts in policy and discourse. Although it is not the intention of staff-student shadowing to allow managers to 'spy' on lectures and lecturers, there is also the possibility that information and impressions will be gathered and reported as 'judgements' on quality.



The study therefore teases out emerging issues of power relations, including whether the scheme may give staff more power to legitimate proposed managerial changes (based as they would be on observation of student experience), and the extent to which students gain in power through being both objects of surveillance and powerful subjects. Recognising that power relations permeate every level of the university's community of staff, the study also seeks to identify whether the way in which the purposes and outcomes of scheme are perceived is dependent on positions held in the hierarchy by participants. Furthermore, as Vasquez (2012) asserts, the manner in which data is foregrounded or backgrounded by shadowers will be subject to negotiation between shadowing partners. This negotiation will be influenced by power relations, structures and status and will therefore also be considered in the study.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Methodological Approach**

This chapter discusses the benefits and problems associated with insider practitioner research. It then examines the use of ethnographic and quasi-anthropological approaches such as shadowing in corporate and public sector environments, particularly where research is carried out by insiders. Methods used in the research study – online questionnaires and loosely-structured interviews – are critiqued, and an explanation of the role of my own self-participation and reflection is given. Finally I outline my inductive, social constructionist, approach to analysis of findings.

As a member of staff responsible for setting up and studying the value of a new scheme, my research can be defined as insider practitioner research examining, through qualitative surveys and interviews, the experiences of staff and student participants. Insider research is characterized as *'research by complete members of organizational systems in and on their own organizations'* (Brannick and Coghlan, 2007: p. 59). They are *'immersed experientially in the situation'* (Coghlan, 2003: p. 456) and *'involved in carrying out systematic enquiry which is of relevance to the job'* (Robson, 2002: p. 534). Costley et al, using the term work-based research, describe it as *'active, personal, experience-based, linking theory and practice, illuminative, situated and reflective'* (2010: p. 160). In essence it is about bringing to the surface what is really happening – a form of institutional research (Watson and Maddison, 2005) – which can create stronger links *'between research, practice and policy'* (Furlong and Oancea, 2005: p. 5).

The benefits of insider research are widely discussed in the literature. Senge (1990) emphasizes the importance of knowledge gained through practitioner research to the development of the organisation, and McNiff and Whitehead (2002) see it as a means of improving practice. Furlong and Oancea (2005) claim there are two ways in which insider research can contribute to institutional development. Firstly there is instrumental or 'technological' use in providing evidence and ideas which can be put into practice. In the shadowing scheme this might be in the form of quality enhancements. Secondly, there is a capacity-

building contribution which can lead to personal change in practitioners and their practice, which in the terms of the shadowing scheme may be staff development.

A key advantage for the practitioner researcher is that they already have good insight into the organisational culture and micro-politics and the way in which these are enacted through policy and practice. At the macro-level they will have clearer understanding of external pressures within the sector and the manner in which these influence organisational and individual behaviour. As a result, insiders can ask research questions which stem from their lived experience (Brannick and Coghlan, 2007) and contextually embedded knowledge (Evered and Louis, 1981). These questions can be raised with colleagues to whom the practitioner has easier access than would be the case for an external researcher. Data sources may also be readily available, with the practitioner trusted to have the practical and interpretive skills to use information in an accurate and ethically responsible manner, not least because they are bound by their employment contract to comply with institutional policies.

As a trusted colleague an insider may be able to obtain richer, more meaningful data from others in the organisation by probing more deeply and sharing personal insights based on common experience, language and understanding of the socio-cultural environment (Nolan, 2003). Instincts about power structures, taboos and subtexts can be brought into play and will help in negotiating a path to valued information (Hannabuss, 2000). Insiders are also more likely to be able to communicate speedily with colleagues as they have a range of means available to them including intranets, emails, telephone and face-to-face encounters. They know the pressure-points in regular cycles of workloads and therefore the most appropriate times to approach colleagues for help. This not only reduces logistical complexity in conducting research, but also saves time and money both in the research process and in the implementation of improvements to practice resulting from findings. If these improvements constitute a challenge to the status quo they may be more acceptable to the institution if the source of suggestions has come from theory generated via the informed perspective of an insider (Costley et al, 2010).

There are, of course, potential drawbacks for practitioners researching within their organisation. Those who espouse positivist methods would argue the importance of a detached, neutral and context-free stance (Evered and Louis, 1981). On the other hand, Hammersley argues that ethnographers can enhance validity *'by a judicious combination of involvement and estrangement'* (1992: p. 145). However, it is debatable to what extent an insider can *'look at the familiar from a fresh perspective and become open to discovering what they do not see and how their perspective is grounded in their functional role or occupational sub-culture'* (Coghlan, 2003: p. 456). Brown and Dowling (1998) contend that it is not easy to drop assumptions or the tendency to take common experiences for granted (McEvoy, 2002), instead adopting a stranger's perspective. Insider researchers may also experience role conflict and may need to establish a new identity for themselves in relation to how colleagues and managers perceive them (Workman, 2007), negotiating around existing structures *'with creativity and ingenuity'* (Costley et al, 2010: p. 6). Hannabus (2000) asserts that this is simply not possible and that a switch in role may be too great a credibility gap for colleagues.

For staff participating in student shadowing, the activity is in effect a limited form of participant observation based on a broadly ethnographical approach. Bryman (2001) contends that ethnography and participant observation are difficult to distinguish, as both involve the researcher in observing behaviour and conversations, using questioning in order to develop understanding of the culture of the setting and the ways in which people interpret their own daily lives and actions. Ethnographic methods are described by Cohen et al as capturing *'... the diversity, variability, creativity, individuality, uniqueness and spontaneity of social interactions (...) with a commitment to the task of social science to seek regularities, order and patterns within such diversity'* (2000: p. 139). Participant observation is defined as a method *'in which the observer participates in the daily life of the people under study...'* (Becker and Geer, 1957: p. 28). The aim is to surface *'the detail, the subtleties, the complexity and the interconnectedness of the social world it investigates' ... 'shadowing a person or group through normal life, witnessing first hand and in intimate detail the culture/events of interest'* (Denscombe, 1998: pp. 217-8).

Shadowing and participant observation have the same inherent flaw in that the presence of a researcher-participant will modify the situation in some way (Brown and Dowling, 1998; Schwartz and Schwartz, 1955), with the possibility that those being shadowed, or other people involved in the setting, will change their behaviour (Hill, 2009). As Gill states *'The intersubjectivity of shadowing establishes the ethnographer as neither unobtrusive nor invisible, but as always impacting the field ...'* (2011: pp. 117-8). This intersubjectivity includes not only the relationship between shadower and subject, but also other people who are indirectly involved in the research, who may be trying to understand the shadower's motives and interpretations of what they are observing (Vasquez, 2012). When shadowing is carried out over a longer period of time the shadower and subject may become accustomed to each other, which may help to increase the authenticity of the experience, or may make it more difficult for the shadower to maintain a detached stance. However, even where this is the case other people, such as colleagues who have only occasional interaction with the shadower during the shadowing, will not be so accustomed (McDonald, 2005). Responding to an insider/colleague shadower who is trying to assume the role of outsider may be experienced by these people as *'... unsettling, discomforting, and destabilizing ...'* (Vasquez, 2012: p. 160).

Ethnographic and quasi-anthropological methods have gained currency across a range of sectors including commercial, public services and government departments (Pink, 2006; Roberts, 2006; Gobo, 2008). Advantages of such approaches are that ... *the researcher 'steps into the shoes' of the research 'subjects' and understands 'problems' from their multiple perspectives, de-constructing them, and this in turn opens up possible solutions that organisations would otherwise struggle to comprehend* (Hart, 2006: p. 147). These methods, which have phenomenological roots, are increasingly being employed in marketing and commerce, where first-hand experience of the customer is studied to obtain rich insights which can inform the action of managers (Elliott and Jankel-Elliott, 2003). Commercial ethnography is described as enabling organisations to ... *engage with people in their 'natural' settings, to gather information about environments and cultures, to acquire concrete and actionable recommendations on how to improve both products and processes, and to gain insights into the so-called 'lived experience' and behaviour of consumers* (Gobo,

2008: p. 3). Jordan (2013) describes corporate ethnography as a mix of research methods which may include participant observation and shadowing, the key feature being that it is situated in the business world and is concerned with providing insights into organisations and solutions to real-world problems.

Suchman (2000) characterises such research as a new application of anthropology, shifting from academia into the corporate world where it is seen to be commercially valuable in supporting capitalist enterprise. Included in these applications are 'impure' and 'focused' ethnographical approaches, which are much more time-bound and short-lived, such as accompanying shoppers to observe their behaviour in order to provide companies with new perspectives on consumer activity which they may previously have taken for granted (Roberts, 2006). While it could be argued that 'hit and run' methods (Denscombe, 1998) cannot yield meaningful findings, Knoblauch (2005) suggests that while 'focused' ethnography lacks the traditional long timescale of conventional ethnographic research, it has the advantage of intensity of data collection concentrated on specific aspects of a field such as particular events or activities.

Costley et al (2010) point to the usefulness of ethnography when the researcher is already an active participant as a member of an organisation and is thus able to carry out institutional ethnography. Institutional ethnography is described by Quinlan as capturing '*the local, everyday experiences that are situated within an institutional order*' (2008: p. 1483) and analysing inherent social relations – particularly those which influence action - while not attempting to maintain any social distance between researcher and those being studied. However, a more critical voice would contend that ethnographical studies risk taking insufficient account of the power of structures and hierarchies within institutions and how these impact on routines and relations (Ashwin, 2009), including internal politics and '*institutional realities*' (Ravitch and Wirth, 2007: p. 85). This may be particularly true for insider researchers who may find it difficult to suspend their preconceptions in a familiar setting (Denscombe, 1998) and may, through identifying too closely with research subjects, fail to recognise their own bias (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983) or that of others who will have a range of individual and collective perspectives (Newman and Jahdi, 2009). Practitioner researchers must therefore be systematic about documenting and reflecting on

their identities and roles in relation to participants (Ravitch and Wirth, 2007; Bell, 1999).

Ethnography is attractive to researchers who seek multiple perspectives. Gellner and Hirsch (2001) point to the propensity of ethnography to produce unexpected conclusions, as the relevance of anything observed could be taken into account, including everyday routines and taken for granted activities (Schwartzman, 1993). The usual channels of information monitoring are circumvented, with the perspectives of participants given primacy instead (Mosse, 2001). In Gellner and Hirsch's view this makes ethnography subversive, as it works against the *'countervailing trend towards control, measurement, and quantification of outputs'* (2001: p. 2). Observing what people do, rather than what they say they do, throws light on what subjects may take for granted or on behaviour which people may find difficult to describe themselves (MacDonald, 2001). Mann (2008) therefore argues that phenomenographic research carried out in higher education, to explore students' background contexts and foreground their subjective experience, has contributed to understanding of the situated nature of learning, rather than making assumptions about their behaviour. As he puts it *'Like a snail and its shell, individuals are never without context'* (Mann, 2008: p. 57).

The staff-student shadowing scheme itself, therefore, is a limited form of quasi-ethnographical insider institutional research, with staff participants undertaking two half-days of intensive shadowing, including informal discussion with students between activities. My research study builds on this to examine the operation of the scheme, the perspectives of those taking part and the influence of power relations on those perspectives and subsequent outcomes. Staff and student participants were surveyed immediately after the shadowing experience by means of separate on-line questionnaires, consisting mainly of open questions (figures 6 and 8), which were also used in the pilot study (Appendix I). Responses elicited in the pilot were sufficient to inform my thinking and planning in relation to the full research study. Nevertheless, I needed to repeat the surveys in the full study – partly to help shape the loose structure for subsequent interviews with staff and partly to obtain feedback from students in a way which did not unnecessarily encroach on their free time and good will. Full responses

to the questionnaire are not included in the study as more detailed and useful reflection emerged during interviews. When answering structured questions online respondents probably constructed their responses quickly and the content of their answers was driven by the shape and sequence of my pre-determined questions. I was also conscious that the identity of a number of staff was clear from their responses and that attempts to anonymise comments would dilute their meaning.

In order to obtain richer data on the experiences and viewpoints of participants my main method was that of in-depth loosely structured individual interviews, prompting responses which I could later categorise using paraphrasing and verbatim quotations. This approach would enhance internal validity through providing '*qualification of actions, ideas, values and meanings through the eyes of participants rather than quantification through the eyes of an outside observer*' (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995: p. 26). Interviews allowed issues emerging from questionnaire responses to be probed, clarified and tested in more depth. The relatively unstructured methodology provided scope to allow respondents to recount experiences in a naturalistic way, enabling me to pursue interesting aspects as they surfaced (Hill, 2009). I did not include full transcripts of interviews in the study, partly because some of the interviews lasted over 45 minutes and partly because I needed to protect the identity of participants. Anonymisation of short extracts from interviews was possible in my written analysis, but providing full transcripts of each individual interview would have enabled colleagues to piece together the identity of participants – perhaps through their style of speech or range of interests.

Loosely structured interviews are criticised by many on the grounds that there is too much scope for bias, both on the part of researcher and interviewees. The debate is summarized by Wilson who states '*... less-structured methods minimize procedural reactivity and allow the freer exploration of respondents' meanings and beliefs. They do this at the possible expense of reliability*' (1996: p. 119). Most criticism stems from the fact that interviews are social interactions which yield knowledge and understanding that is personally constructed. Bias lies within the respondent's interpretation of the questions and issues raised, which is filtered through their own set of meanings, beliefs and experiences. They have



their own unconscious '*biographical baggage*' (Cohen et al 2000: p. 121) through which their experiences are filtered to become '*reconstructed stories*' (Scott and Usher 1999: p. 17). Temporary meanings may emerge which can '*escape and transform at any moment*' (Jackson and Mazzei, 2012:6) and recall may be selective (Denscombe, 1998). In addition this reconstruction may be influenced by the relationship between interviewer and interviewee, with respondents expressing opinions and recounting experiences in a manner which can compromise authenticity (Wilson, 1996) through a '*response effect*' (Borg, 1981: p. 87), damaging validity of methods and findings. This hazard may be significantly increased when the interviewer is known to the interviewee (Brown and Dowling, 1998), or is a colleague of the interviewee, producing narratives and statements which are consciously or unconsciously biased or falsified.

To triangulate and test the authenticity of findings from interviews I also participated in the scheme myself. I wished to see for myself how the scheme worked from the inside and whether I would gain insights that could contribute to my professional development or practice. Furthermore, I felt I needed to experience first-hand the potential interplay of power relations – between me and 'my' student and between me and the lecturers whose sessions I would be attending. Participation would allow me to become subjectively immersed (Brannick and Coghlan, 2007) in the shadowing role, and thence to objectify the experience through reflection (Costley et al, 2010). In this way I hoped to expose to myself my own assumptions and presuppositions about the experiences of others, removing any blind spots which might obscure the obvious (Denscombe, 1998).

Reflection is defined by Van Manen (1991) as a way of distancing oneself from events so that they can be seen and interpreted more objectively in order to gain understanding and generate knowledge. In the context of research, it is a way of identifying pre-understandings and seeing how these flux and generate new thinking as the research progresses (Forbes, 2008). Insider researchers use reflection to study their own practice and that of others in the organisation (Costley et al, 2010). This enables them to acknowledge the impact previous insights may have on their current perceptions, and helps to prevent confirmation and reinforcement of pre-understandings, rather than creating new

insights through critical reflection (Ashwin, 2009). Reflection acts as a form of self-development (Barnett, 1997) and in addition, the role of the researcher may be to encourage self-reflection by others (Denscombe, 1998). However, Barnett (1997) citing Touraine (1995) cautions that insider research driven by the needs of institutions may be bounded by corporate interests, thus placing limits on the degree to which reflection can be 'critical'. Nevertheless, like Hill (2009), I hoped that by viewing my own perceptions and those of research participants through a Foucaultian lens this would help me to identify the influence of institutional and inter-personal power relations on my findings.

My theoretical approach was not to start from a hypothesis about the value, or others' perceptions, of the shadowing scheme, but to build theory from data as it emerged, adopting a social constructionist perspective in which people's individual perspectives (including my own) were surfaced and then used to create meaning from the data. This phenomenological approach is helpful in gaining insight into how individuals understand their own experiences and actions (Guba and Lincoln, 2000). An inductive approach has particular value in insider research where context is all-important and in which emerging raw data provides illumination of experience which can then be developed into theoretical or applied conceptualisations (Brannick and Coghlan, 2007; Hammond, 2009; Hill, 2009). It also allows more flexibility to follow up interesting avenues revealed in interviews and to change focus as the research progresses (Costley et al, 2010).

My general approach was therefore inductive, with generalizations emerging from the data rather than being hypothesized in advance. Whilst some might refer to this as grounded theory, I hesitate to make this claim because the study generates insights worthy of further exploration, rather than theory per se. However, my approach was chosen so that I could use a constant comparative method (Denscombe, 1998) to analyse data in order to categorise emergent themes and issues in a way which created some meaning, for *'at the beginning of a study the researcher is uncertain about what will ultimately be meaningful'* (Merriam, 1998: p. 179). It was helpful to analyse findings from the pilot before amending the online questionnaire and to construct loose categories for exploration in interviews which could be flexed as each interview added new insights. Reference to literature was continuous, both during the research phase

and while reflecting on findings – an approach which not only complemented theory-building but is also commonly adopted by work-based researchers (Costley et al, 2010).

## **Chapter Five**

### **Ethical Issues**

This chapter focuses on the ethics involved in staff-student shadowing and in the related research study. This is a key aspect of the thesis as ethics are entwined with power relations and therefore influence the design of the scheme itself and the research study. The chapter examines issues of trust and power and how these interact within a scheme in which insiders are allowed privileged access to the lives of students and the lecture rooms of academics.

In the staff-student shadowing scheme the shadowers became both subject and object of my research (Kemmis, 2006). They explored the daily life of students as subjects but in so doing were themselves studied as objects in the research project. It may be argued that for me, as a practitioner researcher, there was also a triple role as critical reviewer of those participating in the scheme, as a participant myself and as self-critical observer of my practice in running the scheme (Lomax, 1994). The students themselves were cast in the role of objects of research, but also contribute as subjects in providing feedback about the scheme and potentially in raising issues of concern about their experiences as students. There were, therefore, many inherent ethical issues to be addressed in my research, not least the very vital importance of trust between me and all those involved (Swing, 2009) including students, their shadowers, lecturers whose sessions would be attended by shadowers, and senior staff who would have an interest in the findings of my research.

Ethical issues have to be negotiated very carefully in order not to exploit privileged access to internal data and subjects, but at the same time respondents may restrict access to information according to the researcher's position in the hierarchy. Power relations may be weighted in favour of the researcher if research subjects feel they are in subordinate positions and believe they have no choice but to take part. This could lead to reduced openness and unwillingness to share opinions, coupled with a sense of exploitation (Griffiths, 1998). In Foucault's terms these respondents would not simply be recipients of power but would be actively resisting by protecting their own interests (Mills, 2003). On

the other hand, a researcher who does not have a senior management or executive position in the organisation may be viewed with suspicion or seen as subversive (Costley et al, 2010) by those in positions of power. As Brannick and Coghlan describe *'access at one level automatically may lead to limits or access at other levels'* (2007: p. 67). Length of service of an insider-researcher, and therefore perceived understanding of the workings of the organisation, its heritage, folklore and narratives, may be an important factor in establishing trust with participants.

In institutional research, relationships have to be constantly negotiated *'as insider and outsider, facilitator and collaborator, participant and observer ...'* (Ravitch and Wirth, 2007: p. 77). New relationships may also need to be forged with members of the institution who had not previously been within the organisational network of the researcher. Alternatively, existing associations and affiliations with internal networks could have negative or positive influences on levels of trust (Brannick and Coghlan, 2007) and therefore on the nature of responses from research participants, some of whom may have greater concerns about protection of privacy. Those who feel they have greater rapport with the researcher may make revelations which they would not make to an outsider or colleague whom they knew less well, creating a dilemma for the researcher in whether to include these (Denscombe, 1998). *'There are, in short, all too many opportunities, not for winning friends and influencing people, but for losing friends and influencing everyone to regard you as a threat and a nuisance'* (Hannabuss, 2000: p. 104).

In my research design and throughout the project I followed key ethical principles set out by Diener and Crandall (1978), namely to avoid harm to participants, to ensure informed consent, to protect privacy and to avoid deception. Insider research carries potentially higher risks to researcher, research subjects and the institution in which research is conducted. Hitchcock and Hughes highlight a dilemma for insider-researchers arising from *'the tendency of organizations studied to expect some 'pay back' in the form of value-free and quantifiable 'facts' or 'remedies' often to support their existing or future policies'* (1995: p. 53). As well as guarding against this potential threat to objectivity, I needed to anticipate the conflicts which could arise should any

negative findings be revealed which *'may reflect negatively on the participants ... or on the students who are being represented'* (Campbell and Groundwater-Smith, 2007: p. 38). There was a possibility of personal conflicts of interest resulting from my insider role, with concomitant value-laden prior assumptions about anticipated findings - potentially resulting in *'covert manipulation'* (Workman, 2007: p. 152). For example, if findings revealed issues of concern which appeared to conflict with the values of the University, or my own values (Workman, 2007), I may be tempted to ignore or distort these issues through desire to protect the reputation of the University and my own vested interests within it (Costley et al, 2010). If such findings were included in a published report this could compromise the positions of other staff (Brannick and Coghlan, 2007). Political skill is therefore needed to manage potential role conflicts arising from carrying out simultaneous roles as employee and researcher while maintaining an ethical stance in avoiding harm to participants or institution. As Gellner and Hirsch stress, *'The researcher on organizations today knows that any ethnography that is recognizable will immediately be read by the people it is about, and every word must be weighed in consequence'* (2001: p. 10).

Issues of confidentiality and anonymity are even more critical when carrying out insider research. For example, McEvoy highlights the difficulty of ensuring that a colleague has truly given informed consent to be interviewed, especially if there is a power differential, arguing that *'I am conscious that they could feel that they are obliged to say yes if I ask to interview them, as it may appear discourteous to decline my request'* (2002: p. 55). Furthermore, knowing that the researcher will be moving from interviewing one member of staff to another, participants may have concerns that comments made may be inadvertently revealed in discussion, for the researcher may not understand that particular observations may be sensitive in relation to internal micro-politics or relationships. While personal names and roles may be anonymised in written accounts, circumstances and narratives may be highly individual and therefore easily discovered (Wiles et al, 2008), particularly by knowledgeable insiders (McEvoy, 2002). This is especially true where the organization is named, but as Costley et al acknowledge (2010), the more that findings are anonymised and de-personalized the less valuable the data may be. Like McEvoy (2002) I found colleagues very willing to be

interviewed for my research, but as he suggests, this may have been because it would have seemed impolite to decline, especially in a University where conducting research is highly valued.

While there was potential for ethical dilemmas to arise during my research, many issues needed to be addressed in the operation of the shadowing scheme itself. Across higher education and among the academic community in particular there is considerable suspicion about, and resistance to, inspection and monitoring systems (Barnett, 2003), which may be perceived as a method of identifying poor performers among staff (Bell et al, 2009). As McDonald (2005) points out, shadowing requires agreement for access from a series of people. In setting up the pilot study I took measures to consult in advance with the academic staff union in order to avoid a risk that the scheme may be perceived as 'management' observation, resulting in hostility to requests for shadowers to be allowed to accompany students to lectures. In taking this action I was protecting my own position, both as a member of the union and as a 'mediator of management' (Mann, 2008), treading a narrow path between my identities as researcher and as implementer of a management-driven scheme. I carefully followed ethical approval processes in my dealings with shadowers and student participants, but beyond consultation with the union and seeking consent for shadowers to gain entry to lectures and seminars, I could not anticipate which other staff or students (ie not direct participants) might be encountered during shadowing. Like Quinlan (2008), therefore, I did not attempt to seek informed consent from all those who were not directly involved but who might feature, however hazily, in the research findings. This included friends and classmates of the students being shadowed, who were in some cases quite integral to the shadowing experience, for example when shadowers became actively involved in groupwork during lectures. It was therefore very important for me to protect the privacy of 'collateral' participants by ensuring anonymity and confidentiality in writing up findings.

Ethical issues and dilemmas (both for me and for participants) which surfaced during the operation of the scheme, or emerged through my research, are discussed in Chapter Seven.

## **Chapter Six**

### **Methods**

The first part of this chapter outlines the method of operation of the shadowing scheme, including lessons learned from the pilot, how participants were selected, their key characteristics and why they volunteered to be involved.

Section 7.2 then describes the research methods used (online questionnaires, interviews and self-participation), including a comparison with methods used by the University of Exeter to evaluate their own staff-student shadowing scheme.

#### **7.1 The Shadowing Scheme**

The pilot shadowing scheme was established in 2010-11 and methods employed in setting it up are described fully in Appendix I. The stated aims of the scheme were:

- to enhance staff understanding of the daily experience of University of Winchester students
- to suggest ways in which students' experience can be enhanced, for example through improvements to services, systems or facilities
- to open a different communication channel with students
- to open up possibilities of longer-term mentoring relationships where appropriate

The pilot research study examined whether the operation of the scheme seemed to achieve these aims. It also tested practical procedures including provision of information about the scheme, methods of selecting and matching participants, obtaining timetabling data and securing consent from lecturing staff whose sessions would be visited by shadowers. To gather feedback staff and student participants were asked to complete online questionnaires after their shadowing experience. Responses were analysed to assess the insights staff had gained into students' lives, and actions and enhancements staff judged to be needed as a result of the knowledge they had gained. The survey was also designed to elicit views on the operation of the scheme itself and how it might be improved



in future. The purposes of the student survey were to find out what had motivated students to volunteer and how they felt about the scheme, both in terms of its operation and the concept of shadowing itself. It was also designed to be a means of teasing out whether there was a mis-match between what students felt staff should already know about their experience, and what they perceived staff to have actually learned during the process.

Key findings from the pilot suggested that students had embraced the scheme and felt valued by the interest senior staff had taken in them. However, as all student participants were volunteers this finding was perhaps unsurprising. In answer to the question 'In light of your experience, do you think the shadowing scheme should be extended to more students and staff?' nine students stated 'Yes' and three 'Perhaps'. Students only identified two specific gaps which they felt had become apparent in shadowers' knowledge about their daily experience. One of these related to difficulties when rooms had been double-booked and another student felt the shadower should have known more about the breadth and content of their course. However, it was clear from staff responses that they had learned a great deal more than this and it is likely that staff did not reveal to students other gaps in their knowledge.

Nine of the ten staff who completed the questionnaire in the pilot stated that the scheme should continue, with one stating 'Perhaps'. Reported benefits to staff were that the scheme had enhanced their understanding of students' experience and that, where they were in a position to do so, it had allowed them to follow up issues raised. The scheme had achieved its aim in opening a different communication channel with students, thus complementing routine surveys. Staff reported greater understanding of the need to focus on better quality facilities and systems for students and recognition that addressing student needs should be given high priority by all staff.

The potential opening up of mentoring relationships between staff and students did not occur, although in one case a member of staff offered the student the opportunity to shadow them in reverse for a day. The student concerned was studying Business Management and the member of staff was in a senior management position. The student noted in her feedback questionnaire '*I learnt*

*a lot about the University and its outside university activities'*. However, this was as far as the experience went and no longer-term relationship continued. As the Senior Management Team had not identified this as a primary aim of the scheme and there were no resources to sustain it as a formal element, I decided to remove it from the second year of operation.

The pilot showed that various improvements could be made to the operation of the scheme, including starting it earlier in the academic year. I had encountered similar problems to Evans et al (2009), who had set up a student-staff mentoring project at the University of Hertfordshire and had found that when students were available staff were busy marking, and when staff were available students were taking exams, thus making it very difficult to fix mutually convenient times. By bringing forward the start of the scheme it was more likely that these problems could be anticipated and ironed out.

The pilot also showed that clearer guidance should be given to staff about what the shadowing experience could encompass – particularly to encourage them to shadow non-lecture activity. Elliott and Jankel-Elliott's (2003) paper on the use of ethnography in consumer research points out that some of the richest data comes from informal talk between the researcher and customers, noting that questioning can usefully take place in a range of contexts such as while having coffee together. I had certainly found this during my own shadowing for the pilot study.

Various other suggestions were made by participants such as extending the length of shadowing, or shadowing more than one student. These suggestions were not implemented due to resource constraints – principally a limit on funding for incentive payments to students and my own capacity to manage an extended scheme.

Non-participating academic staff, who learned about the scheme from my summary report to a committee, raised concerns that shadowing such a small sample of students carried the risk of highlighting issues which might not represent the experiences of the student body as a whole. This concern is also raised by McDonald in her review of shadowing as a research method, stressing the importance of avoiding *'uncritical acceptance of a single view of the*

*organization'* (2005: p. 459). In addition there was discontent that senior staff seemed to be reacting to issues (for example relating to the teaching environment) they had experienced first-hand through shadowing, even though some of these had been raised previously by academic staff and had received no response. On reflection I concluded that despite the unrepresentativeness of the sample of students shadowed, the fact that some long-standing issues had been revealed to senior staff in a more immediate way and were, as a result, being addressed, could be regarded as a positive outcome from an approach which sought to explore the experience of individual students not those of the average 'typical' student.

Most staff participating in the full post-pilot scheme and research study were senior managers, including members of the Senior Management Team (three), Deans of Faculty (three) and Directors of Professional Services (three). However, three other staff were nominated by their senior managers. Two of these had middle-management roles and the third an administrative post. I had no power to determine who participated in the scheme itself, which had been opened to senior staff and their nominees, but I decided to include all participants in the research except for one, whose anonymity I felt I could not guarantee. The overall profile of shadowers included in the research was broadly similar to that of participants in the pilot study (Appendix I) and is shown in Figure 1, together with details of the student with whom they were matched.

For the purposes of this study, 'professional services staff' are defined as those who are not in the senior management team, are not engaged in teaching or research activity and who work in departments of the University which provide support for learning, teaching and research.

Full details of the method of encouraging student participants to come forward are given in the pilot study at Appendix I. As the process had worked well for the pilot I did not change it for the second year, other than to bring the process forward to earlier in the academic year. While I could have advertised for a longer period to attract more volunteers, I did not wish to have so great an imbalance between numbers of staff and students that too many students would be turned down.

**Figure 1: Staff participants in research (including myself)**

<b>Staff Role</b>	<b>Student Gender</b>	<b>Study Year</b>	<b>Programme</b>
Senior Management Team Member	M	1	Business and Law
Senior Management Team Member	F	2	Performance Management
Senior Management Team Member	M	2	History and Politics and Global Studies
Dean	F	1	Social Work
Dean	F	1	History
Director of Professional Service	F	1	Psychology
Director of Professional Service	F	2	Primary Teaching
Director of Professional Service	F	1	Media Studies and English
Director of Professional Service	M	3	Events Management
Professional Services Middle Manager	F	1	Digital Media Development
Professional Services Middle Manager	F	3	Politics and Global Studies
Professional Services Administrator	M	2	Journalism

My first step was to advertise for student volunteers in the first week of October. This was the first timetabled week of the new academic year, thus giving me the maximum possible time to make arrangements. I used two methods of advertising, firstly a message on the student intranet and secondly via the Student Union's website. I received twelve responses on the first day, including six in the first hour. The final total of volunteers was twenty-six, of which thirteen were matched to staff including me. Also in the same week I sent an email to all senior managers (Deans, Directors and senior management team) inviting their participation. Again there was a prompt response, with five staff volunteering in the first forty-eight hours.

Before the pilot shadowing scheme was established, the Vice-Chancellor had consulted with the Student Union to seek their support and I had additional discussion with the Student Union President. It was agreed that student participants would be given a £15 gift card as an incentive to participate in the scheme. This would be issued at the end of the shadowing on completion of a short on-line survey, thus ensuring completion of the questionnaire. The survey was always intended to be integral to the operation of the scheme itself as a way

of seeking students' evaluations of the worth of the process. It was also a means of checking how authentic they felt the experience had been and whether they had suggestions for improvements to the scheme in future. In terms of my research study, however, my focus was on the value of the scheme from the perspective of *staff* participants. Therefore, there was no need for me to add any further incentive for student participation as I judged that the survey was sufficient for my study as it stood and I did not plan to carry out interviews with students. However, consent was secured from students to use their questionnaire responses in my research, with a promise of anonymity in my written report. Nevertheless, perspectives of student participants would be very interesting to explore in more depth in future iterations of the shadowing scheme.

Figure 2 shows the characteristics of those who volunteered. The gender balance of students applying and participating was broadly in line with proportions among the study body in general. Programmes of study spanned all four Faculties in the University. As more students came forward than there were staff who volunteered, some remained unmatched and therefore did not participate. Those who were matched with staff and participated in the scheme are in bold and italics.

In the advertisement for volunteers, students were asked to give any reasons why they thought their experience might be of interest to staff. I had found this to be helpful during the pilot as it provided additional context for staff when expressing their preferences among the students available. I summarised this information (omitting anything which I felt was too personal or sensitive in order to protect students from potential harm) and provided it in an additional column on a spreadsheet alongside details of course, year of study and gender of students. Seven students noted personal circumstances of potential interest to staff shadowers. For example, some students noted that they were mature, had children, had specific health issues, studied part-time, commuted to the University or were from overseas. Five students felt that their programme of study might be of particular interest. Reasons given by students for volunteering are shown in Figure 3.

Figure 2: Student applicants

Gender	Year	Subjects	Level
<b>F</b>	<b>1</b>	<b><i>Psychology</i></b>	<b><i>Postgraduate</i></b>
<b>F</b>	<b>3</b>	<b><i>Politics &amp; Global Studies</i></b>	<b><i>Undergraduate</i></b>
F	3	Education Studies	Undergraduate
<b>F</b>	<b>1</b>	<b><i>History</i></b>	<b><i>Undergraduate</i></b>
<b>F</b>	<b>1</b>	<b><i>Media Studies &amp; English</i></b>	<b><i>Undergraduate</i></b>
<b>F</b>	<b>1</b>	<b><i>Digital Media Development</i></b>	<b><i>Undergraduate</i></b>
F	1	Drama & English	Undergraduate
M	2	Modern History	Undergraduate
F	2	Event Management & Business Management	Undergraduate
F	1	Business Management	Undergraduate
F	1	Modern Liberal Arts	Postgraduate
F	3	Childhood, Youth & Community Studies	Undergraduate
F	3	Primary Teaching	Undergraduate
<b>F</b>	<b>2</b>	<b><i>Performance Management</i></b>	<b><i>Undergraduate</i></b>
F	2	Business Management	Undergraduate
<b>F</b>	<b>1</b>	<b><i>Social Work</i></b>	<b><i>Undergraduate</i></b>
<b>M</b>	<b>2</b>	<b><i>History and Politics &amp; Global Studies</i></b>	<b><i>Undergraduate</i></b>
<b>M</b>	<b>1</b>	<b><i>Business and Law</i></b>	<b><i>Undergraduate</i></b>
<b>M</b>	<b>3</b>	<b><i>Events Management</i></b>	<b><i>Undergraduate</i></b>
M	2	Politics & Global Studies	Undergraduate
<b>F</b>	<b>2</b>	<b><i>Primary Teaching</i></b>	<b><i>Undergraduate</i></b>
M	1	Historical Studies	Postgraduate
F	1	Primary Teaching	Undergraduate
<b>M</b>	<b>2</b>	<b><i>Journalism</i></b>	<b><i>Undergraduate</i></b>
M	2	Journalism & Theology & Religious Studies	Undergraduate
M	1	History	Undergraduate

Figure 3: Reasons given by students for volunteering to participate	Mature	Commute	Health	Course	Help Univ.	Interest	Voucher	Respect	Internat.	Social side
An interesting experience for both the shadower and me.						#				
1) To share my experiences in my unique position (part time, commuting mature student with childcare on uni days 2) the voucher!	#	#					#			
I felt that it would be a good experience to meet a member of senior management and share my, generally positive, views of the university.					#	#				
I had previously experienced it and knew how beneficial it was for me as a student and for staff.					#	#				
I thought it would be an interesting experience, and the high street voucher.						#	#			
I thought it would be beneficial to the University to view aspects of my course that could be improved for future generations and to keep in the things that currently work well.				#	#					
I wanted to highlight the needs of individuals with mental health problems.			#							
It appeared that not many people I had talked to knew about the course. I thought it would be interesting to find out what a member of staff would think about the course.				#						
I thought that for someone to experience the production of a WINOL bulletin would be the best way for them to experience the Journalism course at Winchester.				#						
Monetary Reward; I have simple tastes.							#			
To help staff gain the knowledge and experience of university lectures and life.					#					
I am a great believer that students should be treated with respect and be appreciated as customers by the University, therefore would be more than happy to take part.								#		
You could gain an insight into what it is like for a mature student?	#									
I commute to university so I feel my experience will give a different perspective on how a normal half day is for those who don't have the option to go home between lectures		#								
I could offer the perspective from a mature student point of view and would be happy to help the university with this research	#				#					
I am happy to participate with schemes aimed at improving university experience. As a 'mature' student (26) I do not necessarily fit the student stereotype which may or may not be of interest to the scheme.	#				#					
I am an international mature student and have a different routine than other students that may apply for this scheme. The scheme is a great idea to actually see what students do and how they experience their course and the workload that comes with it.	#								#	
I would like to take part in this scheme as I like to help the university whenever possible. My program of study may be of particular interest to senior staff members.				#	#					
As a combined honours student I believe that there may be a bit more variety to my academic education than those doing a single honours course				#						
I would like the opportunity to discuss the current, and my past two, years of study with a senior lecturer in order to express the positives, and some challenges, I have faced throughout my degree that may help to support other students in future					#					
I think I would be a good student to shadow as I have a good social side to me which is good in my lectures and outside of them which would be interesting to follow.										#
I would like to take part simply because I think it would be an interesting experience!						#				

Figure 3 is interesting in that eight students expressed their desire to assist the University in researching student experience with a view to making improvements. Five students indicated they felt that participation in the scheme would be beneficial or interesting for them. One of these students had participated in the pilot. These positive responses concur with the findings of Roberts and Higgins who found that students in focus groups were '*... delighted that someone was asking for their opinions and listening to their concerns*' (1992: p. 8). However, it is also possible that responses reflected what students felt they *should* say in order to be selected (and thereby to receive the incentive gift card). Three students explicitly stated that they were incentivised by the gift card, though it is likely that others may also have been.

The final selection of students to shadow was made by staff picking from the spreadsheet students who most closely matched their preference and who had not already been selected by someone else. Although I did not ask staff to give reasons for their preferences, some volunteered them – these can be seen in Figure 4. It appeared that six of the twelve staff participants had specific reasons for their selections and might therefore have had a particular agenda in mind to explore in their shadowing experience. Of those five staff who cited a particular interest in the Faculty or degree programme of the student, two had academic backgrounds and three were from professional services. Another two professional services staff selected students who could help illuminate issues pertinent to their roles. Both of these related to the teaching and learning technology environments where specific programmes were timetabled. This focus on academic infrastructure reinforces the notion of blending between academic and support roles (Whitchurch, 2008), as professional services staff play an increasingly significant part in enhancing the learning experience of students (AUT, 2001) and contributing to '*activity that straddles both professional and academic domains*' (Whitchurch, 2009: p. 2).

Reasons for wishing to participate were explored in post-shadowing questionnaires and interviews and are discussed in Chapter Seven. As will be seen, some of the specific reasons given relate also to the selection of preferred students. My own selection was made on the basis that the student was one of



the first to volunteer and had not been picked by anyone else. This was also true of the student I shadowed in the pilot phase of the scheme.

**Figure 4: Reasons given by staff for selection of student** (questionnaire responses)

Reason	Number of staff citing reason
Particular interest in subject being studied by student, or technology integral to programme, or Faculty in which they studied	5
An 'average' student (ie with no special circumstances)	1
International student	1
Interest in lecture rooms where student is timetabled	1

The process of matching staff and student availability and seeking consent from lecturers took more time in some cases than others, and on some occasions arrangements had to be re-scheduled due to unforeseen circumstances such as illness or demands on staff workload. Six staff completed their shadowing during the first semester (before Christmas 2011) and the other seven during the second semester (between January and March 2012).

## **7.2 Research Methods**

Research methods comprised four elements – analysis of post-shadowing online surveys of staff, analysis of post-shadowing online surveys of students, in-depth post-shadowing individual interviews with staff and reflection on my own shadowing experiences both in the pilot and in the full study.

### **Online surveys – staff and students**

Immediately at the end of their shadowing experience staff and students were asked to complete an online survey summarising their views about the operation of the scheme and what they had learned from participation in it. A total of eleven students and ten staff completed the questionnaire. The survey was not originally designed specifically for this research project, but was created by me as an integral part of the design of the shadowing scheme in order to gather aggregate feedback which could be reported to the Senior Management Team in a useful format.

As noted in the pilot study (Appendix I), the online survey was a low cost, efficient means of obtaining broad-brush initial feedback from staff and student participants. Responses were useful as a basis for providing some shape to subsequent interviews with staff and for highlighting issues to be followed up in discussion. The use of open questions, without pre-coded categories, made analysis more problematic, but allowed respondents to describe their experiences and learning in their own terms (Weisberg et al, 1996). Nevertheless, I was aware of the limitations of this type of survey, in particular that respondents may not expend much time or effort in composing answers. This became apparent in staff responses. For example, answers to one question varied in length between 424 words from one respondent and 4 from another. Questionnaire surveys are also limited in their usefulness in that they do not reveal the thoughts or meanings underlying responses (Brown and Dowling, 1998).

Schemes at the Universities of Bath, Exeter and London South Bank also included questionnaire surveys to elicit feedback. It is interesting to compare the questions posed by the University of Exeter and those included at Winchester. Neither university anonymised responses. In my case it would have been easy to identify staff and students from their responses as each shadowing experience was different, and anyway I wished to explore issues in relation to participants' position in the management structure.

In terms of student questionnaires, Exeter's questions (Zandstra and Dunne, 2012) are shown in Figure 5. (Specific questions relating to reverse shadowing of the staff member by the student have been omitted, although the final question could cover either part of the shadowing process.) Exeter's questions appear to be more focused on eliciting student views on what they learned or gained from shadowing staff. From twelve responses quoted in relation to the first question (motivation for involvement) eleven gave reasons relating to their own development and only one said they were motivated by the chance to help staff understand student views. In comparison, therefore, Exeter's survey was less designed to surface students' views of the scheme as a potential mechanism for

enhancing staff understanding of their experience and more to seek their perspectives on the scheme as a tool for their own development.

**Figure 5: University of Exeter's questions for student participants**

- Please write a brief explanation of why you chose or decided to take up the offer to be involved in the shadowing scheme
- Please write a brief outline of what you hoped/imagined you would gain or hope to learn from the experience
- Your impressions. Some questions you may wish to consider:
  - What did you learn from the process?
  - What do you think you gained from the experience?
  - What do you think are the benefits of shadowing?
  - What do you think you will be able to draw on from this experience when deciding on future employment?
  - Would you recommend the scheme? If so why?
  - Do you think shadowing is something the University should continue? What form do you think it could take going forward?

The Winchester questionnaire for students is set out in Figure 6. All eleven students completed the survey. In contrast to Exeter, the survey was designed to elicit what students felt staff may have learned from their shadowing, how authentic they felt the experience was and what improvements could be made to the scheme. As anticipated, based on experience from the pilot, most students gave fairly short responses to most questions. As the focus of the study was on staff experiences this was not a problem. However, the survey did provide a check on whether the reported activities involved in the shadowing correlated with those recorded by staff. Student responses also revealed some issues which they felt had surprised their shadowers and these were helpful to consult when preparing my interview questions to find out what staff felt they had learned. To test the 'observer effect' in which the presence of the shadower/observer modifies the setting, I drew upon the suggestions of McDonald (2005) and Quinlan (2008) who argue that validity can be strengthened by questioning subjects about how authentic they felt the situation or event had been. I was aware, however, that students may have unconsciously

modified their behaviour when being shadowed, or may not have wished to admit to a change.

**Figure 6: University of Winchester's questions for student participants**

- In which aspects of your University life were you shadowed?
- Why did you volunteer for the staff-student shadowing scheme?
- Please note any interesting things that you learned from talking with your 'shadow' that you didn't know before
- Please note anything you learned from discussion with your 'shadow' that surprised you. For example, was there anything which seemed to be new to them which you assumed they already knew?
- Do you feel that the lectures/events your shadower experienced were 'typical'?
- How comfortable did you feel when being shadowed? (very comfortable, comfortable, slightly uncomfortable, uncomfortable, very uncomfortable) Please note any comments to help us understand your answer to this question
- Do you think you changed your behaviour at all because you were being shadowed?
- Please note any suggestions for how the staff-student shadowing scheme might be improved in future
- In light of your experience, do you think the shadowing scheme should be extended to more students and staff? (yes, no, perhaps) Comment on your answer here if you wish

Exeter's questionnaire for staff comprised the questions shown in Figure 7 and Winchester's questionnaire is shown in Figure 8. Similarities exist in questions relating to why staff had chosen to participate and whether the scheme should continue in future. However, Exeter's questions are more open/less directive with a focus on what the shadower learned and might apply in their own practice in working with students in future.

**Figure 7: University of Exeter's questions for staff participants**

- Please write a brief explanation of why you chose or decided to take up the offer to be involved in the shadowing scheme
- Please write a brief outline of what you hoped/imagined you would gain or hope to learn from the experience
- Were you interested in shadowing a student from a particular subject area, year of study or fee status? If so please state which and if possible why
- Your impressions. Some questions you may wish to consider:
  - What did you learn from the process?
  - What do you think you gained from the experience?
  - Did it change your perspective of students' experiences of Exeter?
  - Has it changed how you might work with students in the future?
  - What do you think are the benefits of shadowing?
  - Would you recommend the scheme? If so why?
  - Do you think shadowing is something the University should continue? What form do you think it could take going forward?

In contrast the Winchester questionnaire seeks observations from shadowing relating to specific aspects of students' experiences. Questions were phrased so that staff were encouraged to report a holistic view of what they had observed and experienced, including learning and teaching in formal sessions, students' study habits and problems, use of support services, social aspects and administrative processes. A key difference from Exeter's approach is that the survey was designed to bring out not only learning points for the individual which may lead to action in their own sphere of responsibility, but also learning which the shadower felt should be transmitted to others in the University in order to bring about enhancements to the student experience. The Winchester questionnaire is also more structured and directive in order to inform the shape of subsequent interviews.

**Figure 8: University of Winchester's questions for staff participants**

- What components were included in your student shadowing experience?
- What did you learn from attending formal learning and teaching sessions (eg lectures, seminars, tutorials)? For example, was anything different from your expectations? Do you have observations to make about the learning and teaching environment, or the ways in which students responded and engaged with the session?
- What did you learn afresh about students' study patterns and habits? For example, when, where and how they study
- What did you learn about how enthusiastic/engaged students seemed to be with their programmes of study?
- What did you learn about study problems or issues students seemed to be having?
- What did you learn about where students generally go for support with problems, and whether they are helped by that support?
- What did you learn about where and how students socialize?
- What did you learn about any frustrations or issues students have with any aspects of their university experience? For example, this might include systems, processes, timetabling, facilities, programme delivery, assessments or any other aspects raised in discussion
- What actions might you now take, as a result of the shadowing experience, in your own role/area of responsibility?
- As a result of your shadowing, what issues do you now feel the University as a whole needs to consider/address to enhance the student experience?  
Please be as explicit as possible
- Why did you volunteer for the staff-student shadowing scheme?
- How might the operation of the staff-student shadowing scheme be improved in future?
- In light of your experience, do you think the shadowing scheme should be extended to more staff?

### **Interview methods**

Obtaining rich in-depth feedback from staff participants, through post-shadowing one-to-one interviews, seemed likely to yield useful illumination of

points which by necessity could only be raised briefly in online questionnaire responses. In total 11 staff were interviewed, with 10 of these completing the questionnaire. The pilot had raised important and interesting considerations relating to professional relationships and their embedded structures of power – between staff and students, and between staff shadowers (particularly those drawn from senior management) and non-participant academic staff. These and other issues were explored in semi-structured in-depth probing interviews with shadowers, identifying and opening up themes which had emerged at the aggregate level and interesting points which had been noted by individuals.

The loosely structured interview question schedule is provided at Appendix II. Interviews took place within four to six weeks of the shadowing experience, varied in length between thirty and forty-five minutes and were tape-recorded for later verbatim transcription. One interviewee asked to see the interview guide prior to our meeting, but in all other cases they did not. However, participants were informed that the interviews would cover similar ground to the questionnaire survey but in more depth and breadth. I used the interview schedule to ensure that key questions were addressed, but deviated from it when it seemed important to follow-up insights and observations which I had not anticipated, or which were unique to the individual concerned.

All the interviewees were well known to me and it could therefore be argued that an objective, balanced view of their responses would not be possible (Stephenson and Greer, 1981), due to my preconceptions about them and their role or position within the hierarchy and also our shared enculturation as members of staff at the same institution. However, as McEvoy (2002) asserts, colleagues are still differentiated by other social characteristics which may have a greater impact on their understanding than any shared meaning which arises from being co-workers. Nevertheless McEvoy argues that *'Shared experience may act as a catalyst that helps to generate new avenues of inquiry by opening up and extending the depth of a discussion'* (2002: p. 52).

## **My own participation in the shadowing scheme**

I wished to experience shadowing from the inside, judging this to be very important in order partly to experience the processes and understand how it 'felt', and partly to gain insight into what and how I learned from the perspective of my own role at the University. From a methodological point of view I planned to use my reflection on the experience to inform the types of questions I would put to other shadowers and to test the authenticity of their responses. My reflection, particularly on my shadowing during the pilot phase, would enable me to consider emergent themes and issues in a way which created some meaning, for *'at the beginning of a study the researcher is uncertain about what will ultimately be meaningful'* (Merriam, 1998:179). On a more personal level, I was keen to attend some lectures to bring myself up to date with current pedagogical practice, having not taught for eight years.

I shadowed two students, one in the pilot scheme and one the following year. The students I chose to shadow each year had both been among the first few to volunteer, but had not been selected by others. Both were males in their final year of study, with one studying in the Business School and the other studying a social science programme.

### *Shadowing in 2010-11*

I followed exactly the same protocols as all other staff participants, pairing with a third year undergraduate in a social science discipline. Matching my availability with his timetable for Semester One proved initially to be straightforward. However, the lecturer due to teach his group on the first chosen date responded to my request to shadow the student by stating in an email *'I would have to refuse on this occasion'*. In keeping with my agreement with the academic trade union I did not enter into further discussion with the lecturer. Instead I agreed a different date with the student, in Semester Two, and this time received an enthusiastic response from the second lecturer, welcoming me to attend.

Having settled arrangements for one date, the student and I then identified another earlier one – in Semester One on 13<sup>th</sup> December 2010 - when he was



due to attend a careers interview. The careers interview lasted 30 minutes and I sat alongside the student while he discussed his plans and was shown various websites by the adviser. I was not involved in the discussion, but made a few brief notes about the types of questions asked by both parties and the advice the student was given. After the interview we had coffee together in a social space, when we chatted informally both about what he had learned from the interview and about his experience at the University in general. Again I jotted down a few key points. Later in the day I drew together all my notes taken during the interview and in our informal discussion, writing them up in more detail.

My second half-day of shadowing took place in Semester Two, on 14<sup>th</sup> February 2011. The lecture lasted two hours and was attended by 22 students who were drawn from three different subject areas but who were studying a common module. During the lecture I sat alongside the student in a room which had no desks and seemed to be accepted as one of the group. I took handwritten notes throughout, focusing on the ways in which my shadowing partner and his fellow students engaged in the session. I also recorded my perceptions of the physical environment and my own responses to the teaching and learning methods in which the group were engaged.

After the lecture I had a final meeting with the student in the Learning Café. I had no fixed agenda and waited to see what the student wished to raise with me. He was keen to share his experiences of his third year assessments and how he had chosen his modules. Again I took some brief notes, particularly in relation to matters I felt could be included in my summary report, along with those reported by other staff participants in response to the research questionnaire.

On each of the two half-days I wrote up my notes in detail as a narrative account, reflecting on key insights I felt I had gained. I then summarised these notes, edited them to ensure anonymity of the student, lecturer and careers adviser and appended them to the pilot study. The summary appears again as Appendix IV to this study.

### *Shadowing in 2011-12*

In the second year of the shadowing scheme I selected a student who was in his third year in the Business School. My selection was based on the fact that he had applied early to take part in the scheme but had not yet been selected by any other shadower. We agreed two dates when I would shadow him in lectures, namely 14<sup>th</sup> November 2011 and 21<sup>st</sup> November 2011. The lecture on 14<sup>th</sup> November was attended by 15 students and lasted 2 hours, while the second lecture was attended by 16 students and lasted 1.5 hours. In both lectures I sat alongside the student at a desk, the desks being arranged in rows. My method of taking brief contemporaneous notes, so that I could quickly capture experiences and perceptions of how my student partner engaged in the lectures, had proved to be helpful during the pilot, particularly as I was able to analyse and summarise them the same day in order to produce a reflective account. I therefore followed the same processes again, deliberately setting aside time after shadowing to gather my thoughts and write narratives. One difference, however, was that while I typed up detailed reflective accounts, I did not attempt to anonymise them, keeping them for my own use rather than publishing them as an appendix to the study. The reason for this was that I planned instead to draw out key themes and integrate them into the overall research findings, comparing and contrasting my own experiences with that of other participants (for example pp.75-82 and 88-92).

In addition to shadowing in the two lectures, I also had an extended discussion with the student in a social space when we explored issues which he felt had been important elements of his own experience. These included settling into the University, coping with dyslexia, using technology, communication with administrators, experience of assessment and feedback. I took detailed notes in shorthand, writing these up later in the day and including key points in my aggregate report on the scheme to Planning and Resources Committee. I also referred to some of his observations in my research report where themes which emerged in our discussion matched those arising from interviews with staff participants.

## **Chapter Seven**

### **Findings**

*(Quotations from interviews with eleven participants in this chapter are attributed to staff as follows: ASM – Academic Senior Manager; PSSM – Professional Services Senior Manager; PSMM – Professional Services Middle Manager/Administrator.)*

#### **What shadowing was undertaken?**

In response to the questionnaire, experiences reported by staff to have been included during shadowing are listed in Figure 9. However, it was clear from interviews that every one of the ten staff had also met informally with their student before shadowing began and most had chatted with them between scheduled events.

**Figure 9: Experiences reported by staff to have been included in shadowing**  
(questionnaire responses)

<b>Component</b>	<b>Number of staff reporting that component was included in shadowing experience</b>
Lecture	8
Seminar	4
Practical workshop	4
Groupwork within timetabled session	6
Groupwork outside the timetable	1
Individual study in Library	1
Individual study using IT or media facilities	1
Socialising in café or dining hall	1
Meeting with class members	1
One-to-one tutorial	1

Figure 10 maps these experiences against individual shadowers and their role type. A noticeable difference is that the experiences of Academic Senior Managers were all reported to have taken place within timetabled sessions,

whereas all except one of the professional services staff undertook some shadowing in other settings. It should be noted, however, that experiences reported in questionnaire responses did not exactly match those reported in interviews, and that one Academic Senior Manager shadowed a student when studying in the Library. However, it would appear that academic staff may have decided to focus more on shadowing in teaching settings.

**Figure 10: Reported shadowing experiences analysed by role of shadowers**

<b>Role</b>	<b>Shadowing experiences</b>
Academic Senior Manager	Lecture Groupwork in timetabled session
Academic Senior Manager	Lecture Seminar Groupwork in timetabled session
Academic Senior Manager	Lecture Seminar
Academic Senior Manager	Lecture Tutorial
Professional Services Senior Manager	Lecture Seminar Individual study in Library
Professional Services Senior Manager	Lecture Practical workshop Groupwork in timetabled session Meeting with class members
Professional Services Senior Manager	Seminar Practical workshop Groupwork in timetabled session
Professional Services Middle Manager/Administrator	Lecture Practical workshop Groupwork outside timetabled session
Professional Services Middle Manager/Administrator	Lecture Groupwork in timetabled session Socializing in Learning Café
Professional Services Middle Manager/Administrator	Practical workshop Groupwork in timetabled session Individual study using IT or media facilities

### **Why did staff participate?**

In response to the survey question '*Why did you volunteer for the staff-student shadowing scheme?*' eight staff gave reasons relating to insight into student experience. This was unsurprising given the stated aims of the scheme. Of

these, three stated they were seeking better understanding of specific issues, specifically use of IT, the experience of disabled students and experience in the classroom. One member of staff noted they had volunteered *'As part of staff development'* and another gave a more personal reason *'I thought it would be an interesting experience. Also I am considering doing an MSc next year and thought it would be good to remind myself of what lectures are like!'* These more specific reasons resonated with Costley et al's caution that *'When researching work based settings, it is vital that you acknowledge the existence of different practitioner viewpoints'* (2010: p. 108). They point out that perspectives will vary according to factors such as length of service, age, status, work role etc. In view of this, and the questionnaire responses, I decided to probe more deeply at interview to find out to what extent staff had entered into shadowing with their own agenda.

Seven staff stated they had particular issues they wished to explore through shadowing. Five staff with non-academic roles ranging from middle management to senior management wanted to experience different aspects of infrastructure or environment from students' perspectives. These included whether teaching spaces, IT and library facilities were suitable for students' needs both within and outside the timetable. One senior academic manager specifically wished to shadow a non-native UK student *'because my own experiences of higher education have obviously been as native-speaking in this country'*. The other senior academic manager had decided to focus on *'what it was like to be a student on a professional programme'*, including whether advice given at open days about workload on such a programme matched the reality experienced by the student. For this member of staff another type of 'mis-match' was also a concern, this time between the feedback given by students on the programme and comments from an external examiner – *'So where I had external examiners saying it was wonderful, and where students were feeding back it was not as wonderful as the external examiner was saying, I wanted to see that from the students' point of view.'*

Further insight into motivation for shadowing was revealed by another participant while reflecting on how the scheme might be improved in future.

This member of staff felt more information should be provided to staff about students' circumstances before they selected a shadowing partner.

*... just a little more information on the student profile [...] if they commute in or if they are off-site. Are they living in University-managed housing, private landlord accommodation? All that kind of information which might be quite interesting. It might give you a bit more of a chance to sort of fine-tune what you want to get out of the scheme.*  
(PSMM)

Interview responses were therefore revealing as it was clear that participants who had academic management roles wished to focus on particular types of student or to shadow within a specific programme of study, while those with non-academic roles were more interested in experiencing the environment and infrastructure for teaching and learning. This difference was likely to stem from the interests, ability or power of each member of staff not only to learn from the experience but also to put that learning into practice by bringing about change.

A concern for student satisfaction, linked to increased tuition fees and public accountability, was not explicitly given by any staff as a reason for their participation in the scheme. However, it was apparent from interviews that this theme was implicit and had also arisen in discussion between staff and students during shadowing.

*We had a quite long conversation about whether she felt she got value for money for her course and she said that she didn't, which was quite interesting. And I sort of asked her 'how do you think students who are going to be paying eight and a half thousand pounds a year are going to feel?', and she said she did think that would be a major issue.* (PSMM)

*I thought the scheme was really helpful. Really helpful in helping me understand more about the student experience from the student's point of view – particularly given the stress on student satisfaction in all sorts of different ways and also because I want the, you know, the best possible experience for the students.* (ASM)

*I know the student experience is becoming ... it is the single most important thing isn't it ...* (PSMM)

*... if you're paying £9,000 a year for being crammed in [to a room] ... it might raise some questions mightn't it?* (ASM)

*The fact is that from next year they're going to have paid ... near £9,000 for their education.... £27,000 – it's the second most expensive purchase a person will ever make – bigger now than a car with all the other costs. And that's not getting across to our more junior staff at all. (PSSM)*

**Who did staff think would benefit most from participation in the scheme and why?**

A focus on the need for all staff to increase their understanding of the primacy of student experience and to be better informed in order to bring about improvements (as indicated in the final quote above) emerged strongly when I asked which staff should participate in the scheme. Four interviewees (all from professional services) stated that the scheme should be made available to every member of staff.

*I'm tempted to say all the staff would benefit from it. (PSMM)*

*I'd be much more ambitious actually and say that all staff ought to do shadowing. Everyone. (PSSM)*

*I think all staff should do it to be honest with you. I mean anyone from cleaners to senior management to academic members of staff to Faculty people. (PSMM)*

*I think pretty much every member of staff in the University would benefit from shadowing students. (PSSM)*

Others felt the greatest benefits would come from involving staff who were more distant from students. For some this meant 'back-office' administrative staff, while the senior academics who participated felt it was particularly valuable for them and others in academic management who were no longer teaching but had responsibilities relating to quality, as illustrated by the following statements.

*I was obviously very keen to see it from the other side, and to complement what I see in paperwork trails about the student experience – to actually go back into the classroom. I don't have very many other opportunities, except as a Manager I suppose, to get into a classroom, and even now I don't have any direct involvement in peer observation – which I miss because I felt that's what I should always be doing. (ASM)*

*I wanted to do it because I've never been a student here and also I've only ever been in a senior management role here, so whereas when I was*

*directly teaching, and teaching quite regularly, I felt you had a direct empathy with the student experience, the more removed you get away from it I think it's more important then to undertake these sort of activities. (ASM)*

*... having to sit in classrooms, having to stand in queues, having to do this, that and the other, just being in the environment of the student ... literally I think gives you a completely different perspective on what's going on, and really useful for people like me, I think. (ASM)*

*I used to teach all the time and now I supervise PhD students which is completely different. So for me it was really important and one of the reasons I wanted to do it [...] was to get that sense of contact back with the students. (ASM)*

As well as an interest in observing the student experience more directly, there also seems to be a sense of yearning in the comments from these academic managers – a desire to re-establish a connection with students and with learning and teaching. This was something which resonated strongly with my own experience. Before taking part in shadowing I had not taught for eight years (having previously taught for twenty years) and had not been a student in a classroom for nine years. In my reflective notes after shadowing I noted that in one session where the lecturer had been giving hints on how to tackle a forthcoming assignment I had become absorbed in thinking both how I would approach the assignment as a student, and what advice I would have given to the group. In another lecture I had noted the excitement of being with a group of students who were engaging enthusiastically in discussion with the lecturer and how I had missed this regular interaction with groups of young adults.

A sense of excitement was also expressed by an administrator who felt that her role cut her off from students '*I never have any involvement with students at all – January to December it's just a constant – I never see any students*'. Her response to shadowing was immediate and very positive '*It was fantastic to be caught up in the buzz of what they were doing [...] It gave me a tremendous buzz – I can't explain ... it was just fantastic to be on the other side. The lecturers were great and it made me think "this is what I work for"*'.

This response, with its sense of renewed motivation and strength of purpose, would probably reinforce the views of those believing that administrative and support staff would be the group who could benefit most from shadowing. A



number of interviewees could see particular benefits for those working in professional services, suggesting that their relative remoteness from the everyday lives of students impacted on their ability to understand their problems. These views were most strongly expressed by senior managers.

*... those people in professional services ... there are certainly areas where staff are not sufficiently aware of the impact on the student experience from what they and their colleagues do, or if things go wrong [...] The vast majority of our non-academic staff never come into contact with a student except when there's a problem. It's good for them to see what life's like every day (PSSM)*

*I think it's the members of staff that don't come across students on a regular basis that benefit the most [...] a lot of colleagues who are very removed from the student and for whom the student is an abstract concept in many ways [...] We've got people in ... some of the functions [...] their interaction with students is much more functional. They register the students – that's it – and therefore their concept of the student's quite abstract, and sometimes this comes through in correspondence with applicants and students ... it's just like no empathy for the fact that there's a person at the end there – it's just a series of marks [...] And of course a number of our colleagues are in these occupations and in quite senior jobs and they've never had a university education of their own, and therefore they have no idea. And again, I'm not blaming anybody but I just think that it would be of value to them having this experience, and I think it would bring those colleagues that don't have direct interaction with students closer to the student experience and therefore have greater empathy for the students. (ASM)*

*I think it's really useful for professional services, and that's not just because I'm on the academic side of it. You know I send students to professional services and they come back and tell me various things, and I often think, well, I wouldn't quite have put it like that to a student. And also you get a sense of them being defensive as though you're criticising, when actually all you're trying to do is make it better for the student, and so to experience that first-hand rather than somebody else tell you is actually much better. (ASM)*

Implicit in these comments and others is the notion of a divide between academic and non-academic staff in general, along with a perception that the latter have a reduced ability to empathise with students through having no direct involvement in teaching.

*I think it would be nice to widen it [the scheme] out to more staff ... contributing to bringing down some of this sort of academic/support staff divide feeling. (PSSM)*

Furthermore there is an isolated suggestion from one interviewee that non-academic staff may not understand or appreciate academic staff.

*It's good for professional services staff who've got a jaundiced view of academics – it would be great for them to think 'wow, these academic people put a lot of work in to what they do'. (PSSM)*

However, it is likely this perspective may be held in reverse by many, perhaps less senior, professional services staff, as indicated by a range of literature on this subject, notably Rowland (2002) and Deem (1998). Indeed the University's own internal staff survey carried out in 2011 showed that of the two hundred and sixty-five non-academic staff responding to the statement *'The work of professional services/support staff is valued by other staff at The University of Winchester'*, fifty-six disagreed, with forty-three of these disagreeing strongly.

Nevertheless, there was recognition among participating professional services staff that first-hand experience of students' daily activities was especially valuable in discerning students' needs, with one respondent revealing again the perception of students as 'customers'.

*I think it's important for middle managers to do it because they need to know what service standards they've got to deliver and what are the problems with their customers particularly – I mean that's a real issue for us because we're a service department. It's very important to us that we know what our customers require of us. (PSSM)*

*... we certainly in (Department) find it very difficult to find out how students are getting on with things and their studies and their experience, so actually being able to go into the environment and see what the students experience [...] I think also being in (Department) we are a little bit removed from the academic side of it – to see how it actually works from the academic side of it is really useful. (PSMM)*

These comments seemed to correlate with those of some students. When asked in the online survey to state anything they learned from discussion with their shadow which was surprising, one said *'I was surprised that my shadow didn't really know what students go through and how academic life works'*. Another stated their shadow was surprised at the difficulties arising from the failure of technology during lectures *'which is not that unusual an occurrence'*.

As a form of staff development, several interviewees expressed the view that the scheme could usefully form part of induction for new staff. Induction is defined by Trowler and Knight as *'the accommodative process which takes place when new entrants to an organization engage with aspects of the cultural configurations they find there'* (1999: p. 178). Trowler and Knight are critical that universities tend to prioritise formal, corporate induction over more naturally occurring processes, a view which might fit with the benefits of introducing the shadowing scheme into induction perceived by two interviewees.

*... it could be built into something like the PG Cert – if there were new academics who wanted to have a broader picture of the whole institution, as opposed to just teaching. (ASM)*

*I think it would be really useful for people who are brand new to the institution. I think they would get a sense of what it's like to be a student. I think that would be good. (ASM)*

Interestingly, a concern was expressed by two professional services managers that there would be some risk in opening the scheme to less senior staff because what they might say to students could be inappropriate or be misinterpreted.

*... there might be a concern about what people might say you know, to students – so a message or response might be given that might not be necessarily what you would want to be said. I guess one of the things about being more senior staff is we all feel the weight of responsibility anyway, so we are quite careful and we know how easy it could be to have something that we said misinterpreted. (PSMM)*

*I can see how some staff may have a more negative impact on the scheme than others in terms of how they approach it and so forth [...] Well ... I guess some aren't careful about what they say, or how they handle themselves in those environments. I guess it's the professional approach to understand what we're trying to do here and maintain that professional approach – some might have a more casual attitude towards it perhaps [...] I guess you know at a senior level you are expecting them to have a bit more responsibility and understanding of those things. I'm not saying that people who aren't senior don't have that as well, but if you had it as a sort of free-for-all there might be scope there for people getting upset. (PSSM)*

Whether the shadowing scheme should be open to junior staff is therefore contested by some managers who have themselves internalized a discourse which limits the freedom of certain categories of staff to make critical observations in free discussion with students.

## What did staff think they learned?

### *Learning from observation*

Staff reported a wide variety of ways in which they had learned from their participation in the scheme. These ranged from small, practical issues which they were able to tackle in some way (reported later in this chapter), to more fundamental new understandings of students and their experience. Some of the more senior staff expressed surprise at how out of touch they felt they had become and how distant from the ways students experience their worlds.

*I was hugely surprised that in a relatively small place like this how divorced I was from what's going on on the frontline. That was pretty much of a shocker really. It shouldn't be after all these years, but it was. (PSSM)*

*... there did seem to be a chaotic side to his existence, which seemed to be alien to the more ordered, timetabled world that we think they live in – and it's not like that you know, so you could quite easily see how he would miss a class, or miss a tutorial ... their world is not as ordered. (ASM)*

*I was quite amazed how lacking in general knowledge some of them were, you know, amazed at some of the naivety. (PSSM)*

All these participants were in management roles and so would have regular access to formal feedback via the National Student Survey, internal student satisfaction surveys or meetings with student academic representatives. Their comments perhaps illustrate the gap left by formal mechanisms which fail to provide 'in the moment' information which is contextualised by events as they occur rather than in retrospective recollection and reconstruction (Quinlan, 2008). This was clearly explicated by another interviewee

*I think you definitely find out a lot about what it feels like to be a student by sitting in the lecture – simple things like, you know, the pacing of the session or, you know, perhaps boredom or entertainment value of what's going on – so those types of experiences you know I think I really – that was very useful for me. (ASM)*

My own experience of shadowing echoed some of the elements of surprise expressed by others. For example, I noted how much commitment lecturers

demonstrated to supporting students with aspects of communication such as spelling out unfamiliar terms, giving tips on grammar and on the use of Powerpoint presentations, and stressing the importance of knowledge of foreign languages. I had gained the impression from informal chats with students in the past, and probably also from reports in the media about graduate employability, that little emphasis was put by universities on developing students' ability to communicate. These perceptions were certainly challenged by shadowing two separate students.

Another area of revelation reported by senior participants related to students' use of technology during lectures, again reinforcing the notion of becoming 'out of touch' through distance from the classroom.

*I was absolutely fascinated by the fact that almost everybody was on a mobile device – a sound that you know I never heard when I was still teaching – pitter, patter, pitter, patter of people. (ASM)*

*I was also quite fascinated how many students use various tablet devices, i-pads during class. (ASM)*

Rapid growth in the use of technology for learning and teaching has been a key characteristic of higher education and significant financial resources are invested in technological infrastructure across the sector, with mobile technologies cited as a major challenge faced by institutions (UCISA, 2012). The importance of understanding how lecturers and students use technology in teaching and learning is therefore of considerable importance to senior staff in their decision-making. Student shadowing could provide additional evidence to support decisions in this area, particularly for those planning and designing support services, as illustrated by other interviewees.

*... obviously some of the IT-related stuff is interesting to see as well, and that's obviously helped us in feeding back into our sort of plans of how we do things. (PSMM)*

*You can become constrained by your own experience, so if you don't know the type of technology that's in use in academic teaching, you don't know how the pedagogical practice is working because you are so far removed from it [...] It's interesting looking at things like the use of mobile devices – the amount of students that were there, you know, looking at either tablets or something in the class, and not having pen and paper but simply using that, you think well that's a change that's*

*only really happened in the last few years and is only going to get more prominent. So how do we respond to that, you know from a building and services point of view? (PSSM)*

*... we have lots of debates with Estates and IT about whether we should put lots of power points in the floor [...] not once did I see someone trying to plug a device in, because actually we're past that ... it's more about connectivity. (PSSM)*

Some staff indicated that their perceptions of students had changed as a result of shadowing and that their new knowledge of students had contributed to a greater sense of motivation and job satisfaction. This was particularly true for one administrator who felt remote from students and who cited this aspect as a specific benefit of the scheme.

*We can have perceptions of students and people can sometimes be a bit negative and critical, but they don't really know what they do, and it's unfair to comment if no-one has an insight, and this [the scheme] gives it. ... Sometimes if you're not involved with students you forget [...] and I do find that people are very quick to complain and it's nice to try and reverse that and make people more positive and sort of be more complimentary about things. (PSMM)*

Comments about the enthusiasm and engagement of students appeared in several responses to the questionnaire. For example,

*I was impressed by the high interest level of the participants in the sessions. (ASM)*

*... very willing to participate, even in a large lecture. (ASM)*

*The group to which the student belonged were very bright and had some interesting views and insights on subjects being discussed. They also seemed to support each other well. (ASM)*

*The students were really engaged with the study and had a lot to prepare for sessions. (PSMM)*

*There was a lot of humour in the way the students worked as a group but it was also very focussed and on task [...] There was excellent engagement with the discussion. (ASM)*

During my own shadowing experiences I attended three lectures. I noted that the students I shadowed were highly engaged in the activities and discussion throughout. All their classmates were attentive, though not all became involved in discussion to the extent that 'my' students did. My reflective notes on one

lecture state *‘students were engaged, respectful and clearly interested in the subject, answering questions and posing questions’*. I have retained a clear mental image of this lecture, which now springs to mind whenever I think of learning and teaching at the University. The extent to which I have internalised this positive picture has indicated to me how much impact shadowing can have on participants’ tacit understanding of current practice and student experience in the classroom. I believe it has given me an increased feeling of pride in students and in my academic colleagues. However, it is important to note that all student participants in the scheme had volunteered and they may therefore have been those with a tendency towards engagement with their study and the University more generally. Nonetheless, there was no reason to suppose that their classmates would share this tendency.

Many staff had learned about problems and issues faced by students through their direct observation in timetabled sessions and in other experiences they had shadowed. Some of these were matters that they felt they could deal with swiftly, taking a trouble-shooting approach. These are discussed later in this chapter. Others were more structural or procedural in nature, so were simply reported back in online survey responses or during their interview with me. Many of these issues related to IT infrastructure or to learning and teaching spaces.

However, one professional services senior manager was less convinced about the degree of learning through shadowing.

*I didn’t learn much that I didn’t already know. It was mildly interesting for me, having worked here for a very long time, to actually go to a couple of lectures and the seminar and just see how it really worked on the ground ... but really it would be hard to justify doing it again. (PSSM).*

Nevertheless, this participant went on to say that shadowing could be more useful for others – *‘I think it would be nice to widen it out to more staff [...] I think it would be useful to give them an insight’*.

### ***Learning from conversation:***

For some shadowers much of what they learned from the experience came from talking with students as much as from observing them. These staff

acknowledged that theoretically they could talk to students without participating in a shadowing scheme. However, when probed as to how the scheme had helped in this respect several participants noted that being paired up with a student in a more formal way had facilitated and 'given permission' for one-to-one conversation between staff and student, as the following exchange indicates.

PSMM: *... just meeting the student and having a chat with them was probably more interesting.*

Interviewer: *So if that's the most useful bit, I mean why can't you do that anyway?*

PSMM: *Yeah – there's absolutely no reason why you can't just go up to a student and have a chat with them, but it's just having that kind of formal process in place – you know you're not just randomly going up and talking to some student, which I would imagine most students would probably find rather odd.*

Another shadower explained how much importance was attached to eliciting student feedback in their Department and compared what they had been trying to do with the advantages of formalising this within a shadowing scheme.

*I have suggested to people that maybe they should just go up to students in the Learning Café and obviously ask them politely, and interrupt what they're doing, but it's difficult to get people to do that and you do feel very awkward. You are putting them on the spot, so that thing about giving them permission to speak is actually really more important for me in the end. (PSSM)*

A general theme therefore emerging from the interviews was that there was significant value in a formal scheme which nonetheless allowed informal free-flowing conversation. As one interviewee put it

*... through having one-to-one chats with him – that's where I learned the most, because in an environment where he's willing to talk – in a quiet environment or over a cup of coffee you get to know the student more. (ASM).*

Other shadowers highlighted specific information that had come from chatting to their student partners between formal teaching sessions and other activities. Bartkowiak-Theron and Sappey note the importance of this “down-time” (such



*as travel to and from locations and walks between buildings)*' (2012: p. 8) in their explication of the differences between shadowing and observation or interviews. For example, one academic manager had gained a wealth of information about extra-curricular and social activities in which the student was involved and how they managed their time effectively. It seems that this conversation may also have benefited the student as the shadower noted *'we talked about managing that and how she fitted in all the work'*.

In terms of two-way communication, another participant had clearly passed on helpful information, for one student noted in the online survey *'When talking to my shadow I did not really learn much, but [...] gave me some very useful feedback on my work and gave me some advice for the website my group and I needed to put together'*. However, not every shadower reported the value of informal chat. One senior manager commented *'I had to work quite hard to get a kind of social chat environment going – it just didn't quite work'*.

Many staff reported the value of conversation in learning about specific problems students faced. These included issues pertinent to individual students only, such as those relating to health and disability, or to their living arrangements, family circumstances or off-campus access to the internet. Some were generalisable to groups of students such as those from overseas, those studying part-time or commuting to the University. Some potential solutions to these problems featured, or were implied, in reported conversations, for example

*As a commuting student there's nowhere to lock things away safely and what she would welcome is a commuting student's locker. (PSSM)*

*Her lectures were on a Thursday and Friday and in terms of the only complaint she had on the academic side was that there was no Demonstrator available on a Thursday or Friday to help with statistics – they're only in on Mondays and Tuesdays. (PSSM)*

From my own conversations during shadowing I learned about a range of problems both my students had encountered. These included difficulty in locating available computers for private study, waiting time between asking for help with study skills and receiving it, lateness of communication about cancelled lectures, problems with reading lists and the need for additional

support when choosing modules. I included all these in my aggregate report on the scheme, which I had to produce for Planning and Resources Committee (comprised of Senior Management Team, Deans and Directors of Professional Services) as an integral part of the scheme's procedures at the end of the year. From my own perspective only one of these was a problem about which I had prior knowledge and, although I had no power or remit to take individual actions to address the issues raised, I felt my knowledge about these sources of dissatisfaction for the students I shadowed was something I might feed into future management discussions and planning via my membership of cross-University committees, working groups and project teams.

### ***Learning about problems***

As previously noted, most shadowers identified some problems by observing them during shadowing, rather than hearing about them in conversation, and these tended to be infrastructural. Several observed problems relating to technology, which was either not working or was insufficient to meet demand. The opportunity to observe frustrations experienced by students had clearly made impressions on shadowers.

*I just felt from a student perspective that's really poor, that we could potentially have let them down, because the lecturer needed that material to demonstrate. (PSSM)*

*There was no signage about what to do if the printer doesn't work - bearing in mind that this is a student coming in, parking and needing to get on with things. (PSSM)*

*She was working on her laptop. She can print from her laptop obviously, but she can't do it on the site, so why is that? Because she carries her laptop around with her and so it would be logical to be able to print from it ... (PSSM)*

Timetabling and rooming issues featured in a number of interviews and, although these were perhaps not 'new' learning, it was clear that first-hand observation had crystallized students' difficulties for shadowers in ways that standard surveys and student representation systems had not.

*I had to high-tail it up to West Downs for one of his sessions and got there with just like seconds to spare, but he often has one session ending*

*in West Downs and then another session immediately following in Medecroft. (ASM)*

*Well, you know, staff talk to me about rooming the whole time – that if you are talking about activity-based learning and you’re modelling something you need more space. So, I was a student in a session where we could hardly move because you needed tables for what you were doing, there were about 45 students in the room. You know, to actually get up and come to the front to do your presentation was a major upheaval for everybody. So I experienced from the other side what it felt like – not to be the person at the front where you had a bit of room to move about, but to be the student crushed, you know, crammed in. (ASM)*

Experiencing the teaching environment alongside students brought a new dimension to staff understanding and insight. This was clearly expressed by one senior academic manager who identified a moment of gestalt during shadowing.

*The first thing that struck me was how appallingly decorated the classrooms were and how that impacted on the learning experience. You know, the grimness of the classrooms was not exactly encouraging student engagement with what was going on. Whereas, when I moved with him into another space, for another part of his course, and the space was nicely decorated that made all the difference, or it made a substantial difference to the way the students behaved in the space. Now I wouldn’t have picked that up from just talking to him because I’m not sure even he realised it. But just being in that situation, you know, helped me understand something about the importance of colour in the room, which I’d never really thought about before, so yeah that was very good. So I do think that kind of observation bit is important. (ASM)*

From my own involvement in shadowing I learned more about problematic features of students’ experiences. For example, I was surprised to discover that one of the students I shadowed had reached his third year without knowing where to find the careers centre. I also learned about issues relating to course organisation, timetabling, use of email, contact with administrative staff and problems accessing key texts from the Library. However, it also became clear that some matters which I felt were problematic - as a participant-observer trying to put myself in the shoes of the students I was shadowing - were not even noticed by the students. For example I noted my intense irritation during one lecture when a student nearby munched her way noisily through a packet of crisps for several minutes. My own concentration was considerably disturbed, but none of the students present seemed even to notice. I also found it quite inconvenient that there were insufficient tables in the room, making it difficult to

take notes. However, the student I was shadowing indicated that this was perfectly acceptable for him and he preferred note-taking on his lap. On reflection I realised how inappropriate it would be to use shadowing as a form of quality monitoring, given the multiple subjectivities involved in more than a dozen separate shadowing pairs, with different expectations and notions of 'standards'. It is highly likely that perceptions of acceptability and 'normality' would be strongly influenced by shadowers' own prior experience of learning and/or teaching, length of time since they had been students themselves and other factors such as age, gender, experience as parents of children who had attended university and shadowers' current roles in the University.

### ***Solving problems***

Some staff not only identified problems faced by students, but took action in a practical way to fix them. This was not a stated intention or aim of the scheme. In some cases problems were dealt with straight away, while in others the shadower took follow-up actions including reporting the issue to others in whose remit the issue lay, feeding problems into meetings with relevant staff teams, or (in the case of senior managers) taking issues forward with staff whom they managed. The types of problems identified and addressed depended on the role and level of seniority of the staff concerned.

One shadower reported enjoying being able to use skills to help students. Shadowing in a television studio during a journalism session, this member of staff noticed the production gallery clock was not synchronised with one in the studio. When the student said it had been like that for a while, the shadower reported it to the maintenance team but made a point of showing the student and his friends how to do this for themselves in future. The shadower was clearly very pleased to have been able to give some practical help '*... they could see what I did, so maybe they might have learned a little thing from me*'. Another member of professional services staff noted how they had been able to use their shadowing experience to help a Faculty with timetabling problems '*so an actual positive has come straight out of that*'.

Senior members of staff took a range of actions to address issues encountered during shadowing. It was clear that one member of the senior management

team saw this as a primary purpose of the scheme and used the power of their position to trouble-shoot and resolve problems. *'I've been able to use the information gathered to, very quickly and without too much pain, you know sort some things ... lots of one-off things – quick wins.'* This included expediting the return of some assessed written work from a Faculty office and ensuring that a systematic way of identifying faulty personal computers was implemented. The latter issue was identified by the shadower as a problem they would not have been aware of had they not undertaken shadowing *'Another mind-opening thing which I shouldn't be surprised at at all, but when they were in a computer lab with thirty computers and one didn't work, they just went on to the next one [...] so we're relying on those students reporting PCs, but there's no way you can rely on that whatsoever'*.

Senior academic staff unsurprisingly focused their attention on what they experienced in learning and teaching sessions and they also found matters which they felt they could or should follow up. The boundary between lecture observation of the type more commonly found in further education, targeted at giving feedback to lecturers for the purpose of quality monitoring and improvement, and shadowing in order to gain insight from a student's perspective, became very blurred for these staff. The dilemmas arising as a result are discussed on later in this chapter.

### ***Relationships***

I had anticipated when setting up the scheme that staff and students may not feel comfortable with each other and that this could influence behaviours and perceptions, therefore compromising any potential benefits arising from participation. This doubt was echoed by one member of staff during interview who, when considering who should be invited to participate said *'not everybody feels comfortable with eighteen to nineteen year old youngsters'*. In the online survey for students I asked *'How comfortable did you feel when being shadowed?'* Five students said *'very comfortable'*, five said *'comfortable'* and only one said *'slightly uncomfortable'*. Their comments on this question are shown in Figure 11.

**Figure 11: How comfortable did students feel when being shadowed?**

She was very friendly and was comfortable just sitting and watching me work
I got along well with my shadower and found it easy to communicate in an amicable manner with her. There was no shortage of topics upon which to discuss
It was a nice experience and good to chat after the lecture we attended together. I asked upfront what my shadow hoped to learn/how I could make the session as useful as possible
It was slightly uncomfortable at first as I did not really know what to expect, but after the first ten minutes or so it was a lot more comfortable
Shadow fitted in comfortably with the class and was friendly and open to commenting on topics in class
The first time I wasn't sure what to expect, however after talking more with him I felt much more comfortable
There is only one point where I didn't feel comfortable and that was when my shadow and I were in my tutorial and she asked a question which I had hoped my FYP tutor would answer, but it was directed at me and my mind went blank

I also probed the feelings of staff about whether they had experienced any awkwardness, or if their student seemed unsettled. Despite some stating that they expected to feel strange and uncomfortable, it was apparent from interview responses that this had not materialised in practice.

*Initially there was a bit of 'what's he doing here'- type of thing, but actually people soon forget, and certainly in doing the ones I did this year, certainly the workshop-type stuff in the studios, I was just standing by the side as it were and people were obviously quite oblivious to what was going on pretty much. (PSSM)*

*In the two half-days that I did, with the same groups of students, no-one came up to me and said 'who are you and what are you doing' - they just sort of accepted the fact that I was there. (PSMM)*

*I had an extremely good student who didn't seem fazed at all, you know, I don't think she was at all bothered, she just saw me probably a bit like bringing your mum along, but no there wasn't any concern about why I was in there. (ASM)*

*One of the sessions I was in ... half way through the group activity the students said 'oh' – and then introduced me, and the immediate response from the students was 'oh, what have we just said!'. So there had been no ... I could have been anybody, and this group were used to*

*people coming in because of the professional nature of the programme. They were used to all sorts of people being in the sessions. I could have been anybody, so that was quite interesting. (ASM)*

*The students were great – they were really accommodating. They were pleased to have me, you know, as part of their group and sort of participate, which was really nice. (PSSM)*

*As soon as I went he introduced me to his colleagues and ... they were expecting me. So I felt so welcomed. Although they were frantically busy, all of them, they still accommodated me and acknowledged me and I was just part of them in the end – I was just sort of roped in – you know ‘quick, come on we’re going over to the next room’. It was lovely, I felt like a student – it was great. (PSMM)*

However, one professional services Senior Manager was a little less comfortable, mainly due to a perception that it was uncomfortable for the student.

Nevertheless, the shadower’s reflection on this was inconclusive.

*I was concerned that she might feel that other people would look at her a bit oddly because she had this person tagging around after her, and I don’t know what she might have said to any of her fellow students. So I felt it was awkward. I asked her a couple of times whether she felt it was awkward and she said that she didn’t particularly, so I don’t know really how she felt about it, but she certainly didn’t show any particular outward signs of feeling awkward about it. (PSSM)*

A striking feature which emerged from a number of staff was how much they had enjoyed forming relationships with their student partners and the students’ peer groups. Some relationships had continued in different ways after the end of the shadowing.

*We bump into each other which is lovely – she’s a lovely person. Yes – we just check how things are going kind of level of conversation. (ASM)*

*Some of the students who were in one of his classes I got chatting to and now I greet them when we’re out there, and they come up and talk to me and I talk to them, and we have little talks about things and I think that’s lovely actually.... it’s lovely for me, you know, to be able to recognize some faces again and, you know, people smile at me and talk to me as, you know, I walk down the terrace or whatever and I like that a lot. (ASM)*

*What was also different was the relationship that then built up not just with the one student but with the groups of students so that, you know, even now the students that I was with in the first year wave at me, and*

*sometimes I go and sit with them, you know, at lunchtime and talk to them. (ASM)*

This building of relationships between shadowing partners was an unanticipated outcome which seems to have contributed positively to the well-being of staff participants.

Questioning staff about how they had been received by lecturers, and whether they felt their presence might have affected what they observed, revealed a range of responses. Some felt welcomed:

*The member of staff was like 'you're welcome, we'd like you to participate', which was absolutely fine. (PSSM)*

*The member of academic staff there was very welcoming, very positive, and encouraged me to join in, and that was really quite nice. I didn't know him at all, I'd never met him before. (PSSM)*

*All I know is they all said they were happy for me to be there. They were all experienced members of staff. They all incorporated me in different ways [...] And I had one session where the member of staff did a brilliant role play and the students were having to deal with a professional situation in a role play, and she was asking their views on things. And at one point I caught her eye (laughs) and we could see that moment of recognition – two academics – what was going on was actually quite interesting. She could have been on the stage – she was absolutely brilliant. So I don't think it made a difference to her because of the way our eyes caught, you know – she and I both knew what was going on in the session [...] but my sense was they taught as if they just said 'well this is what I've planned'. (ASM)*

Others felt they had barely been noticed:

*Like I say, I didn't get a sense that they were awkward. You kind of got the sense that the member of staff was only dimly aware that someone was coming in ... It wasn't a problem to sort of walk up to someone and say 'hi, I'm here shadowing' – you know, it's not a problem. (PSSM)*

*The two members of staff were both actually Associate Lecturers who were leading the sessions and again I don't think either of them were fazed at all or probably took on board that I might get anything other than just experiencing what it was like. (ASM)*

However, others reported some awkwardness or that their presence had made a difference to the lecturer's behaviour.



*With one of the seminars that I went to it did make a bit of a difference because the member of academic staff who was leading the seminar knew me and did a couple of times sort of talk to me specifically – you know just coz it's the sort of thing people do in these situations – he possibly felt a bit awkward about it because ... in the sense you're doing your thing in front of a colleague, and a colleague who isn't normally involved – and he possibly felt a bit put on the spot. (PSSM)*

*It may have made a difference to the member of staff and I did detect on one occasion the nervousness because I was there. (ASM)*

There did not seem to be a pattern of responses according to the role or seniority of the shadower, or to the role or seniority of the lecturers. Neither did there seem to be any significant difference in terms of whether lecturers were already known to shadowers. However, in future it would be interesting to explore this issue with lecturers themselves – something I could not do for this study due to the short timescale of the scheme and constraints arising from the impending end of the academic year. It is important to note, however, that all the lecturers involved had given their consent to having a shadower in their session, so it is perhaps unsurprising that overall there was apparently little discomfort shown.

In my own case I had contrasting experiences with lecturers. When shadowing during the pilot I had sought consent from the lecturer whose session I attended and received a very enthusiastic response by email – ‘*No problem at all! Come on in!*’. When I arrived at the lecture with my student I was made to feel welcome by the lecturer and sat with the student in a row of chairs at the side of the room. From then on I was completely ignored by the lecturer and the student group as if it was perfectly normal for strangers to appear in sessions. None of the students acknowledged my presence, though I was able to chat with my student at the start of the session. The lecture was interactive with many students asking and answering questions, including my student. I felt quite at ease because my presence was simply accepted and I genuinely felt like a shadow, able to relax and observe.

However, in one of the lectures I attended during shadowing the following year I had a very different experience. I had already met the lecturer concerned on a few occasions, though did not feel I knew them particularly well. I was rather

surprised, therefore, when they started the lecture by introducing me to the students, saying '*she is a lovely lady*', and asking me to explain to them what I was doing. Rather taken aback I briefly outlined what the shadowing scheme involved and explained that I was there to shadow 'J', not to observe them or the lecturer. I therefore immediately felt very visible, rather than the more qualified descriptor used by Quinlan (2008) of 'conspicuous invisibility'. Throughout the session the lecturer regularly made reference to me and drew me in as if I was co-lecturing rather than shadowing. For example in illustrating a point the lecturer referred to Live Aid and looking directly at me said '*of course only Terri and I would remember that!*' When giving tips on how to create a successful presentation the lecturer referred to how 'we' would do it – again referring to me. I found this difficult to handle. I needed to be polite and acknowledge the comments, but at the same time did not wish to encourage further interaction with me, knowing that this was distorting what would be happening without my presence and therefore not giving me a 'true' shadowing experience.

Another shadower had been significantly drawn into one of the sessions attended, partly because their role in the University related to topics under discussion.

*Certainly in (P's) lecture I had quite a lot of input – we were talking about the Chinese government and how they are dealing with the issue of the i-pad. It's been one of the things in the news and I've been thinking about that so I talked about that. (PSMM)*

This member of staff obviously enjoyed their involvement and so volunteered at the end of the lecture to talk to the group at a later date about the University's approach to a particular subject. This they identified as a positive outcome from the shadowing scheme. However, this type of outcome was certainly not intended when the scheme was designed and it is questionable whether the nature of the shadower's involvement in this lecture had gone beyond shadowing. On the other hand, they did participate in the lecture along with the students, which is perhaps closer to shadowing a student experience than simply observing passively. Indeed, I had stated in the staff protocols for the scheme:

*As far as possible you should engage with the timetabled sessions, or other activities, along with the student. Try to avoid just observing and taking notes as this will not give you such a genuine experience.*

### **What ethical dilemmas were encountered?**

Many staff described a sense of unease at various points during their shadowing experience. Often this was related to uncertainty about how to deal with privileged information learned either from observing lectures or from talking with students. The degree of dilemma tended to correlate with the seniority of the shadower, with academic senior managers reporting not only a range of ethical issues, but also different intentions in relation to any follow-up actions. The protocols I issued to staff prior to participation (Appendix III) made it clear that the scheme was not a form of lecture observation set up in order to judge quality of teaching, nor was it designed to surface student complaints which the shadower would then be expected to act upon.

*Do not let yourself be drawn into discussion about the quality of teaching – the scheme has not been set up to make judgements about staff expertise and it would be highly inappropriate to discuss this with students.*

*Be careful not to give the impression that you are a conduit for student complaints. If your student wishes to complain about aspects of their programme you should suggest that they speak with their Student Academic Representative.*

Nevertheless, it was clear that staff had formed judgements about lecturing staff and they shared these unprompted with me in discussion. (I had of course promised in advance to anonymise any comments reported in discussion.) Several commented on the high quality of lecturers.

*She had no problems with the staff, they were very good, excellent staff - and certainly the lecture that I sat through - it was just excellent, it was brilliant. (PSSM)*

*I thought that he was very good. In fact I was pretty impressed with all our academic staff. I thought they were all brilliant in the things I went to. (PSSM)*

*The couple of lectures that I went to the staff were extremely competent with the AV - they were very slick, they were well-prepared and had no problems at all. (PSSM)*

*He didn't use notes, he just spoke with such authority and was so fascinating - everyone was absolutely gripped. And I was completely gripped by it, you know. I was just blown away by it. (ASM)*

*I discovered some stunning teaching, absolutely stunning teaching [...] I saw students who were fully engaged. I saw really, really good teaching – though I was not there to monitor the teaching. I couldn't help but be struck by how good the majority of it was. (ASM)*

Most of the senior academic staff who participated found themselves struggling with what to say to lecturers after their sessions. On the one hand it had been made clear to shadowers, and to lecturers in whose sessions shadows would be present, that the scheme was not set up for shadows to make judgements on their lecturing. On the other hand, shadows were left in an uncomfortable position, feeling that they had to respond in some way, not least to show their appreciation at having been allowed to participate. This dilemma was best summed up by one participant

*I was absolutely sure I was not there to judge the member of staff teaching, but in all cases I was so impressed by the standard of teaching I didn't quite know how to handle that in a way because I thought, you know, should I email the member of staff and say oh I thought that session was brilliant, when I've said to them 'I'm not here to judge you at all?'. And yet I came away from each of the sessions really, really impressed with the standard of teaching, you know it was just fantastic. So I found that a bit difficult to negotiate in a way. It's very hard to be in a room and not formulate an opinion [...] But then you have to think well what would the member of staff think if you don't say anything? (ASM)*

Another senior academic had also deliberated over the ethics involved in responding to lecturers.

*I thought afterwards I shouldn't have said how good the teaching was. I should have said 'I just really enjoyed that, thank you. I really enjoyed shadowing in your session, thank you' – which would have been a neutral comment. Even to say 'I learned a lot' isn't a good thing to say because then they want to know what you learned. So I felt I shouldn't have done that, but I did. (ASM)*

A third senior academic summed up the difficulty of adopting the role of neutral observer/participant. Being in a formal management relationship with the lecturer no doubt compounded the complexity of the situation.

*I do think as an academic coming in, I guess ... the things I focus on most are obviously delivery styles and doing the business at the front of the room really [...] I think probably I still viewed it a little bit as a peer observation – you know I knew that I was picking up issues or looking at the teacher and giving positive signs back to that person – not giving them formal feedback but [...] I think there's always a danger when it's a manager doing the observing, if you like, or the experiencing, that the line between management and being there to experience it from the student's side is very, very difficult to draw. (ASM)*

Although not an academic manager, I experienced this to some degree in my own shadowing. The topic under discussion in one lecture was something I had previously taught myself, though several years earlier. I noted that at some points during the session I found myself focused more on how I would deliver the lecture than on trying to gain insight into the experience from the student's perspective.

The issue of making judgements, but being unable to intervene or take action to rectify problems, was also a theme among professional services participants.

*It was interesting in the lectures to see how some of the things were done. It was quite difficult not to sort of make comments on things that I felt perhaps weren't quite right coz obviously it's just a quick sort of snapshot of that aspect of it. (PSMM)*

One participant was clearly caught in a dilemma between wanting to help struggling students and keeping at a distance.

*There seemed to be quite a big gap between what was taught in the lecture and then what they were being asked to do for this work, so they were really struggling [...] And so they were getting these books and I could see that they were drowning a little bit with what they had to do [...] I wanted actually to jump in and say 'I could help you with that'. Yeah – but obviously it would be limited anyway in the time that I was there, and may have done more damage than good coz I couldn't sustain it. (PSMM)*

These experiences led many participants to speculate on how they would handle a situation in which they felt the quality of teaching was below acceptable standards. In such a situation the following staff, all of whom were senior academic managers, concluded that the need to take action to address problems would outweigh the protocols of the shadowing scheme.

*Well what would I have done if I had gone into a session and the teaching had been appalling and the students had said to me 'it's always like this'? You know, 'this is rubbish', 'they're rubbish', you know, what would I have done? [...]. I would probably have had to have done something, but, you know, how is that reconciled with the fact that you're not there to judge standards of teaching? I think that would be a difficult situation. (ASM)*

*... but the dilemma for me was I was there shadowing – I was shadowing the student, I was not there to comment on the teaching technique of the members of staff, and so therefore it's left me with this dilemma about how, when you shadow, you deal with something that you don't think is quite right. Because, you know, the agreement was not to comment on the teaching [...] Had there been anything that I felt needed dealing with immediately, I would have been ethically bound to do so. [...] You have an ethical dilemma when it comes to having to ignore the boundaries on which you set something up. If something had been completely detrimental to the student I would have had to have said something. (ASM)*

*I mean, don't get me wrong, if something had occurred that was untoward – I didn't like – you know then I'd have to intervene and some action would follow as a consequence. But you know, I didn't anticipate a problem and I didn't find one. (ASM)*

*But then you're in an ethical position - you know if you see something that's going wrong for somebody - what do you do when you've seen it? Do you use that to pull a few chains somewhere or do you say that's just something that I saw and then walk away from it? (ASM)*

For one senior academic the potential for shadowing to become a form of surveillance and observation of lecturing staff was troublesome, even if this was not a deliberate or overt intention among shadowers.

*My natural instinct is to say 'I've just been to a really good session by one of your staff' – well that's not what it should be about really – and yet I've heard that said several times from other senior managers who've been in it ... and I think that [could] just become a tool, potentially a dangerous other tool... and I was very conscious of the fact that it could be seen as being another way of spying on staff really, so I do find that's a problem. (ASM)*

It seems that, from the perspectives of these academic staff in senior management positions, situations experienced during shadowing could very easily push the scheme beyond agreed protocols and into the territory of quality management or even 'quality control' (in the sense of exerting power over what

happens in the lecture room through making judgements on teaching).

Nevertheless, two senior academics did follow up matters they had observed and which they felt could be improved. In both cases these shadowers judged it to be more appropriate to address the issues with all staff under their management, rather than raise them with individual lecturers in whose sessions they had undertaken shadowing.

One had observed a particularly large group in a tutorial which lasted two hours and had reflected that it might be better to split the students so that each half of the group had a one hour session.

*But I've done it not 'you must sort this out' – I've just mentioned that 'I've been shadowing a student, this was my experience, what do you think?' So I have flagged up issues of concern that I have and will be taking some minor things forward. But that wasn't really the purpose of the student shadowing scheme for me. (ASM)*

This member of staff also observed a lecture where one overseas student kept himself entirely separate from others. He talked to no-one and none of the other students or the lecturer made any attempt at integrating him into the group. In this case the shadower did not follow up by talking directly to the lecturer. Rather, they proposed to deal with the issue as a systemic management matter.

*I just thought that's not right. Now I can action that and [...] I will take forward that when groups are formed in future that you don't have anyone from any cultural community isolated in a group unless it's of their own choosing. (ASM)*

The other academic senior manager who intended to pursue an issue after shadowing had observed that a student with a disability was having difficulties engaging fully in a lecture. The shadower felt that the lecturer was not using the most effective strategies. Rather than tackling the lecturer directly, this member of staff planned to introduce staff development so that all staff teaching students with a disability of this type would understand and use the best approaches in future.

*It's left me thinking that if you're going to be teaching a [disabled] student [...] something on the web pages – the staff development web*

*pages - for 'If you are teaching a (disabled) student, please remember the following [...] You know, something that you could say to a member of staff – 'you've got a [disabled] student, you know, remember there's some strategies for teaching [disabled] students on the web'. I thought that was a much better way of doing it. I couldn't do anything else, so it was going to be one of the things I was going to recommend. (ASM)*

Another senior academic proposed a similar more generic response to critical insights gained through shadowing by giving the following answer to the survey question 'How might the operation of the staff-student shadowing scheme be improved in future?'

*The critical issue is going to be making positive use of the experience. We don't want this to be seen as another management tool to fix things, but could be more of a means to exchange ideas about good teaching practices. Perhaps discussion of findings/observations related to pedagogy could happen at an L & T (learning and teaching) lunch? (ASM)*

These staff had therefore dealt with the ethical dilemma of addressing something they judged to be in need of improvement not by criticizing lecturers in whose sessions they had observed the problems, but instead by developing strategic or systematic solutions.

A fundamental concern about the purpose and outcomes of the scheme was raised by one shadower who questioned its potential effectiveness in helping to improve students' experience. This participant felt it was unclear that feeding forward information about problems they had observed would lead to the issues being tackled by those with responsibility. There is a sense in the following statement that shadowing should be more explicitly linked to trouble-shooting and solving problems, rather than simply gaining insights.

*... it's quite frustrating as well – about what we do with that information – it's not something where you can sort of go in and start waving a stick at someone saying 'hang on a minute, this is not right', but to me, some of that information that we've gathered does need to be considered and fed back so that things can be improved [...] I understand obviously you don't want to go and upset people, and maybe put people off, but if there is a sort of understanding that, you know, there may be some things that aren't quite right in the way lectures are done, or the way students are inducted and things like that, then this is a good way of finding that out and feeding it back [...] At the end of the day it's about the student experience, and if they are having a bad experience and we can't change that then it's never going to get any better. (PSMM)*



Echoes of this view were expressed by an academic senior manager but in this case the concerns voiced were more about the partiality and subjectivity of the experience.

*There is a question then though about what it is you do with that knowledge and that's the bit that worries me. And if it is then an opportunity to fix something - that's got a positive spin, but on the other hand it's very arbitrary – what you've seen, what you've experienced – that troubles me. (ASM)*

Furthermore, this member of staff expressed anxiety about the lack of formal linkages between shadowing and other information-gathering methods in the University and the dangers that may result from anecdotal or unsystematic data flows.

*Where does the information go to? [...] There's quite a lot of informal ways in which information is picked up and suddenly you then find that used as evidence against or for something. That troubles me as an institution – that there are these ways in which a picture is built up but without ... with perhaps only one side of it ... and no opportunity for seeing it in context. Lots and lots of informal bits of information can, you know, lead to difficulties. (ASM)*

This concern mirrored comments raised by non-participating academic staff at the end of the pilot scheme when I presented my report to a University committee. A point was made that if an aim of shadowing was perceived by participants to be related to identification of problems, a small sample of students could highlight issues which may be unrepresentative of the experiences of the wider student body. The question of generalisability versus the power of unique perspectives is discussed later. However, at least one senior participant did perceive shadowing to be a means of identifying problems and taking immediate action to solve them – ‘quick wins’ [...] ‘finding out about things that are not right and fixing them’.

Ethical boundaries and expectations regarding problem-solving were tested in a different way for another senior academic manager – this time in relation to interaction with students. This shadower had built up a relationship with the student and their peer group so that ‘even now the students that I was with in

*the first year wave at me, and sometimes I go and sit with them, you know, at lunchtime and talk to them.'* However, the ethics around this, especially for someone in a senior management role, were sensitive.

*That has its other side to it that you have to be careful with, which is that some groups of students don't then seem to have access to a member of staff in a way that others don't. So you have to watch the boundaries with that. (ASM)*

This member of staff went on to describe two situations where the issue had played out in reality.

*... the student I had shadowed in the first year and her friend came up because [...] there was something they hadn't been able to sort. So they then came specifically to see me to see if I could sort it. So that's where I think you have to be a bit careful with some of this stuff. [...] And in the second year that I did it, one student, when they realised who I was, said 'OK, so it's you we come to if we've got something we really can't get sorted. (ASM)*

So the question of students having privileged access to a senior member of staff was perceived to be problematic. It is possible that students might volunteer to participate for this very reason and, of course, any relationship which is established through the scheme is likely to continue at some level as partners encounter each other around the campus.

Another ethical issue, strongly linked to relations of power and hierarchy, was that of consent-giving by lecturers whose sessions would be visited by shadowers. I had approached this matter very carefully when establishing protocols for staff, stating

*It is imperative that you do not visit lectures/seminars unless Terri has first sought permission from academic staff and notified you that she has received their agreement. If permission is not forthcoming from academic staff, or there is some reason why it would not be appropriate for you to visit particular lectures/seminars, Terri will inform you so that you can rearrange the proposed dates in consultation with your student – perhaps by visiting alternative lectures/seminars.*

My reasons for making this explicit were informed by discussion at a meeting of the academic staff union when I had explained the introduction of the pilot

scheme and sought their co-operation and approval. However, I also knew from my own teaching experience that having a senior manager observing a session could be a source of stress and additional pressure for some lecturers and I did not want the scheme to be compromised by resentment over this issue. Such resentment, I believed, could lead to complaints which might jeopardize the continuation of the scheme. Exeter's scheme also required consent from lecturers and, interestingly, one of the outcomes from their pilot is listed as '*The need to be clear with academic staff about the purpose of visiting shadowing partners and give staff the opportunity to discuss this in person prior to the event if needed*' (Zandstra and Dunne, 2012: web). However, my approach was challenged by a senior non-academic manager in the following exchange.

PSSM: *I'd be much more ambitious actually and say that all staff ought to do shadowing. Everyone. But not in the organised way you do it now. Totally different system. You have some kind of marriage shop where people get together, do it themselves, find themselves a student advisor...and get on with it*

Interviewer: How would we tackle the academic acceptance of that, I mean would they just expect people to turn up into their lectures that they didn't know were coming?

PSSM: *Absolutely. Why shouldn't they? Or, no - haven't thought it through - we'd get the member of staff to inform the academics which classes they were going to attend*

Interviewer: And then they would not be expected to say no...?

PSSM: *Absolutely*

Interviewer: Unless there was a good reason?

PSSM: *They'd have to have a very good reason*

A senior academic manager's comments revealed a telling perception that lecturers would not withhold consent unless there was some sort of problem with their teaching.

*One member of staff, interestingly a weaker member of staff [...] didn't want me present. [...] I think if they have got an objection, like the person who didn't want me to observe them, they've probably got something to hide. (ASM)*

A different view was expressed by another senior academic who felt that having visitors present in lectures would present no problems for staff in one particular Faculty (though I cannot verify whether the lecturers in this Faculty would agree).

*I just think you should be able to go into anybody's session. [...] We're used to it the whole time because you team-teach. [...] They pop in and out of each other's sessions. (ASM)*

Issues of consent for lecture observation by third parties can be controversial and sensitive, not only for individuals at different levels within universities, but also for staff unions and professional bodies and are discussed further in Chapter Eight.

#### **A scheme for staff development or for quality monitoring?**

A key aim of my research was to explore what staff-student shadowing meant to the staff who participated. As previously noted, shadowers said they had a range of motivations for participation, with some wishing to focus on experience of particular programmes, types of student or infrastructural issues. Most said they wished to gain insights into student experience, but I needed to probe further to find out whether they viewed the overall purpose of their participation to be for personal development, for monitoring quality or for a combination of these.

When asked whether student shadowing could be defined as staff development, two staff were quite clear in their responses.

*As staff development it really boosted my morale and understanding of how the University works. I didn't learn any key skills [...] but it did develop me in one sense because it opened my awareness and stimulated me and just made me feel better about everything. (PSMM)*

*Oh, undoubtedly I think there's an element of staff development in the sense that I think it makes me a more effective manager to know what's happening on the ground – so yes, absolutely. (ASM)*

Both these interviewees' responses associate staff development with increased awareness of how things work/what happens on the ground, although it is interesting to note that while the more senior member of staff focused on the

importance of this in managerial terms, the other saw staff development as having a role in well-being. A third participant expanded on this to explain that reflection on the insights resulting from shadowing was especially important, particularly for those in management and professional services roles at a greater distance from students.

*It triggers that reflection on what you're doing, which is really important for any professional whatever they're doing – constantly reflecting on whether this is the right way, and very often, you know, professional services and senior managers – whatever level they're working at – are focused on getting systems right, and actually the people in the systems can get lost. So actually I think it's important for people from senior management, people from distance and professional services. (ASM)*

However, it was clear that 'staff development' as a concept was defined in very different ways by different interviewees and that these ideas were not obviously linked to status or role. At one extreme was the comment from a senior professional services manager '*Finding out about things that are not right and fixing them is absolutely good staff development*'. However, the perception of another senior professional services manager, when asked if shadowing felt like a staff development experience, was '*Not to me – it felt like a student experience*'. These responses are probably indicative of the blurred meaning of 'staff development' and multiple interpretations of the term, which can be taken to include a wide range of processes or experiences (McCaffery, 2004).

Other responses revealed that shadowers had seen the purpose of the scheme as a means of bringing to the surface aspects of students' experiences which could be enhanced or improved. Several academic staff saw advantages in using information gathered to complement formal methods of monitoring quality, or which arose through complaints or other means.

*I think that it certainly helped in terms of the feedback I've been able to give my colleagues [...] to enhance the student experience in some way. I don't have opportunities to meet many students, except when they're ... except when there's a really serious problem, so in a way the student experience is mediated to me through surveys or through crisis really, crises. So to be able to enter into, in some way, the reality of the student experience, you know, in a very particular way really – a particular student studying a particular course in a particular year – I think it's really important. (ASM)*

*OK – well I was obviously very keen to see it from the other side, and to complement what I see in paperwork trails about the student experience – to actually go back into the classroom. I don't have very many other opportunities, except as a Manager I suppose, to get into a classroom, and even now I don't have any direct involvement in peer observation. (ASM)*

*And you hear things like 'you can never find anywhere to work' – so actually working with them in different locations, working on group projects, was interesting. So I worked in the dining room, I worked in the learning café, I worked at the back of a session – back of a teaching session – and actually you don't get that qualitative difference in that experience coming through other forms of feedback, and I learned quite a lot from those. (ASM)*

Several staff were quite clear that shadowing served the purposes of both staff development and quality monitoring, with understanding of students' experiences being central to effective actions relating to quality and to infrastructural developments.

*I suppose it's a bit of both really. I know the student experience is becoming... it is the single most important thing isn't it, and if you don't do anything like that then you can't really have an understanding of what the students feel [...] I mean it's just very interesting [...] to get students' feedback. So I think it's a bit of both really. (PSMM)*

*I think it's a bit of both – because staff need to be challenged in what they do, which is ... so if they go there and they have a particular interest and they think 'that's wrong, we need to completely re-address how we deal with a certain aspect of service' or something, then that's partly staff development and quality control. So I think you've got a balance of both really. It's just challenging people's ideas, because I think it's so easy to become sort of ... in your sort of thinking you can become constrained by your own experience, so if you don't know the type of technology that's in use in academic teaching, you don't know how the pedagogical practice is working because you are so far removed from it – unless you've experienced that you won't know. And you know it's interesting looking at things like the use of mobile devices [...] you think well that's a change that's only really happened in the last few years and is only going to get more prominent. So how do we respond to that, you know from a building and services point of view. (PSSM)*

Another senior interviewee pointed out that identifying the need for staff development, as a result of problems revealed during shadowing, was integral to quality assurance and enhancement, particularly for those participants in managerial roles.

*I think that it depends on your location as the person doing the shadowing as much as it does on the shadowing scheme, because I can't get away from my quality assurance role. So I thought there were things that came out of it that I thought were useful for staff development [...] But even that's got a quality monitoring role because what I'm saying is the quality would be better if this staff development was in place. You know, it's like saying 'this needs to happen so what am I going to do to get there – some staff development along the way'. I actually think quality management and staff development are two sides of the same coin [...]. So yes it did have a quality management side to it, but it was also about what could we learn, you know, what could we learn about the student experience, which would help me think about staff development. So it had both – I think they were intertwined. (ASM)*

Nevertheless, there were contrasting views about the extent to which shadowing should be constructed as a scheme to support management decisions. One senior academic manager expressed unease with the notion that information gained through shadowing could be 'used' by management – at least unless there were clearer guidelines in place.

*I would feel more comfortable if it had a clear non-managerial element to it, and that that end of it was tidied up as to what you did with what you saw (ASM)*

### ***Issues of generalisability***

I felt it was important to explore with participants what misgivings they might have about shadowing which, in their view, compromised its value. As anticipated, some identified obvious dangers from attempting to generalise about students' experience based on a brief period of shadowing.

*It's such a small snapshot of things, you know, the next day I could've gone again and it could have been a different experience (PSMM)*

*There's a danger of jumping to conclusions I guess on the back of a very small number of experiences (ASM)*

*I didn't really get under that surface. I don't know how you would do that, and also how, you know, you'd infiltrate sort of the social group in which she's operating (ASM)*

However, a number of participants reflected that the value of shadowing came from the distillation of a single, unique experience, in contrast to anonymous, aggregate or decontextualised forms of feedback from students, as illustrated by the following exchange.

Interviewer: *Do you think there's also the danger though that that skews ... because you're talking to a small group they might have a different view to all the other students in the group?*

ASM: *Absolutely – they may, but then you have the big data sets you've got, you know, from the NSS [National Student Survey], the USS [University Student Survey], the leavers' survey – you've got something where you can begin to unpack that a little bit, because behind all those surveys for every teaching group they may feed back the same thing, but it may mean something completely different to them. So it's helping unpick some of those things that I think is actually quite useful.*

Another senior academic manager closely echoed this view, suggesting that insight into the unique experience of an individual student added something qualitatively different from traditional feedback mechanisms.

*We're doing it to get a sense of what it's like to be a student here and what some of the issues might be. We're not doing it in any kind of systematic, analytical kind of way. If we were, it would become something more than student shadowing – it would be a kind of review system and I think staff would not be happy about that at all, you know. Of course it's partial, inevitably going to be partial, but I think that's a strength of it – that you do get, you know, the particular view. All students are particular and unique and, you know, you get a sense of that. We kind of know what the generic issues are through surveys and you know. I think it's the focus on the particular experience that's so valuable in a way. [...] You know, it's those kind of very particular combinations of student experience that sometimes reveal more than the generic stuff does in a sense. I think that's the great value of it. (ASM)*

Two academic senior managers suggested it would be interesting to lengthen the experience by shadowing the same student again after a gap of a few months to 'see how they're getting on' or to 'see the development of the group of students'.

Others highlighted the value to be found in having access to interactions between students, again contrasting this singularity of data with standard forms of feedback.

*It's good to be able to go to the lectures and hear some of the discussions between the students if you can. I don't think the opportunity emerges anywhere else. (PSMM)*



*It gives a qualitatively different feel to feedback – just listening to the odd comment that they make to each other [...] you wouldn't get that degree of nuancing. (ASM)*

## **Summary of Findings**

Staff participants agreed that the purpose of their shadowing was to gain deeper insight into the daily experience of students and implicit in their responses was a concern for student satisfaction. However, while the focus of the majority of academic participants was on experiencing learning and teaching, shadowers from professional services departments were generally more interested in the infrastructure and environment for learning and teaching. When asked who would benefit most from shadowing, some – especially middle managers in professional services departments – felt all staff could benefit and that incorporating shadowing into induction for new staff may be beneficial. More senior participants, on the other hand, tended to emphasize the benefits for those staff who are more remote from daily contact with students either because of their seniority, or because their roles are more behind the scenes.

In terms of which aspects of shadowing had produced greater insights, most identified the mixture of observation and conversation, although some felt the latter had been most meaningful. Key insights were said to have been related to the organisation of learning and teaching including use of, and problems with, technology, timetabling and the spaces in which learning took place. A number of staff had been surprised by the manner in which students experienced life at the University, gaining insights into how hard they worked, how engaged they were with their programmes of study, how they used technology to support their learning and how they organised their time. In many cases insights related to unique combinations of circumstances for individual students and the specific issues these raised.

However, my own experience revealed that the way in which a shadower interprets what they observe may be quite different from students' own interpretation of their subjective experience. The extent to which shadowers were really viewing situations through the eyes of their partners was, of course, constrained by their own subjectivity, personal experience and current role in

the University. In addition, I and some other participants were alive to the impacts our presence had had on the learning and teaching situations we observed.

Issues of ethics and power relationships had arisen for most participants in the scheme. Relationships between staff and the students they shadowed seemed to be forged without any sense of awkwardness. However, concerns surfaced for academic senior managers about the privileged access the scheme gave to students in being able to advance their own particular viewpoints about issues or perceived problems, even though these concerns did not materialise to any extent in reality. For some professional services participants some dilemmas were more immediate, especially over the degree to which they should intervene to help students while they struggled with problems.

More serious concerns were raised when academic senior managers reflected on relationships with lecturers whose sessions they attended. In particular, while the scheme had not been set up as a means to observe quality of teaching, academic shadowers found it difficult not to make judgements and to decide what to say to lecturers after their session – particularly where they were in a formal management relationship. This concern gave rise to speculation about how they would handle a situation in which they might judge the quality of the teaching they had experienced to be problematic or below expected standards. Comments were made about the fine line between shadowing and spying or surveillance for the purpose of quality monitoring. Those that had actually identified issues during their shadowing had dealt with these in systematic or strategic ways rather than raising them with the lecturers concerned. However, while this was possible for those in senior management positions, who could tackle issues in generic ways with teams of staff, for those shadowers who had no remit to intervene or deal with a problem which was outside their own sphere of influence there was concern about what to do with this type of information. This dilemma arose because the shadowing scheme was constructed as a means for *individuals* to gain insights into student experience, thus contributing to *individual* staff development which could in turn lead to enhancements in quality – but only if the actions needed were ones the individuals concerned could bring into effect. Interestingly, however, some

participants had taken action to trouble-shoot and solve problems either by dealing with them personally, or in the case of a senior manager by ensuring that others sorted them out.

The twin aims of staff development and quality enhancement were seen as strongly linked by several participants. Definitions of staff development varied between participants and therefore the extent to which the scheme contributed to it was contested. As a means of gaining information to support quality monitoring, participants generally agreed that the scheme complemented pre-existing feedback mechanisms such as surveys and that its strengths lay in illuminating unique experiences of individual students rather than providing generic data about collective experiences.

## **Chapter Eight**

### **Power and Agency**

This chapter re-examines the shadowing scheme through the lens of power relations with critical reference to Foucault's writings on discourse, discipline and resistance, as they apply to organisations in general and higher education in particular.

The first section outlines Foucault's key ideas and why I perceived these to be relevant to my study, drawing on the work of authors who have applied his thinking to organisations, including those in the higher education sector. The chapter then introduces critiques of Foucault's work, especially the difficulties encountered in applying his ideas in practice. I then analyse my findings with reference to key elements of Foucault's thinking, namely the power of discourse and specifically the discursive forces which led to the establishment of the scheme, the degree to which discourse seemed to be internalised by participants and the disciplinary effects of discourse and power relations on staff and students involved. I also consider the interplay of productive power and points of resistance, exploring the differing perceptions of participants in relation to their positions within the hierarchical structure of the University. Finally I discuss some limitations in the application of a Foucaultian framework to my research into staff-student shadowing.

Foucault argues that power is dispersed throughout society, with discourse acting as the process through which knowledge and individual subjects are constituted (Gaventa, 2003). For Foucault, discourse is formed by the specific use of language and social practices which produce and represent knowledge about a particular topic at a certain moment in time (Hall, 1997), arguing that the power of discourse is realised through control exerted by social systems. However, this realisation of power is not as a result of the imposition of bureaucratic rules, but through subjects' internalisation of the discipline produced by discourse. Discourse is shared knowledge which is translated into social practices that are characterised as 'normal', thus individuals tend to discipline themselves to normalise their behaviours. Foucault posits that

judgements of normality are created and reinforced through hierarchical observation. Those with greatest power constantly survey and examine others and through these processes gain knowledge which is fed back to impose standards of normality to which citizens conform (Sadan, 2004), thus creating '*docile bodies*' (Foucault, 1979) who are encouraged to reflect and confess to transgressions. Nevertheless, those at the top of hierarchies are also entrapped by discourse (Sadan, 2004), particularly when empowered through their roles as professionals to make judgements about others and be held accountable.

Foucault further contends that discourse can be both a source of positive productivity and one of resistance. On the one hand it can help to discipline and organize social relations in ways which enable people to live and work with each other (Foucault, 1977), creating social quiescence and passive agreement (Gaventa, 2003). On the other, it can lead to contesting discourses in which subjects create their own competing meanings and understandings, resisting the dominant discourse while sometimes appearing to be compliant (Linstead, 1993). Foucault therefore recognises that '*selfhood*' is not stable, leading to '*fragmented, diverse, localized and contradictory nature and operation of discourses ... (and) uncontrollable social reality*' (Grant et al, 1998: p. 197) in which power can be exerted upwards through a capillary process (Foucault, 1977).

Foucault's ideas therefore provide meaningful concepts on which to draw when analysing the operation of, and outcomes from, staff-student shadowing in the University. The overarching significance of discourse in his writings resonates with the driving forces behind the establishment of the scheme, namely those of neo-liberal discourses including marketisation and managerialism. My research explores whether these appear to have been internalised by participants, leading them to reflect on their experiences through these prisms. It also probes participants' concerns and dilemmas, thus examining the degree to which they seemed to encounter personal conflicts with the prevailing discourse and the ways in which it played out in the scheme. Furthermore, Foucault's (1979) focus on surveillance and confessional technologies of the self provided a conceptual framework to research the scheme. Finally, Foucault's belief that power relations permeate throughout all social structures, upwards and downwards,

helped to shape my construction and operation of the scheme, my own place in it and the ways in which participants responded.

Other theorists of power relations have frequently drawn on Foucault's work, using it as a '*kind of toolbox which others can rummage through to find a tool which they can use however they wish in their own area*' (Foucault, 1974: p. 523 cited in Motion and Leitch, 2007). However, his work is also critiqued by those who ascribe greater power to individual agency and the ability of subjects to choose how they act. Clegg and Haugaard, for example, point out that

*We live in complex overlapping frameworks of meaning which actors switch in and out of, which is a facility that enables organizations to create local rules of the game, which may be quite at variance with surrounding social norms...* (2009: p. 440)

Giddens (1984) argues that while people's knowledge and actions are conditioned by social institutions and systems, they behave consciously and are responsible for their own actions. Similarly, feminist scholars such as Ramazanoglu (1993) focus on personal power and argue that Foucault does not take into account social differences such as gender, class and race. They believe that Foucault's approach is therefore elitist and difficult to apply to any understanding of everyday experiences (Ferguson, 1984). These approaches, therefore, do not foreground the power of discourse but give primacy instead to the power of agency and individual resistance.

The choice of ideas as scaffolding for my research seemed to fit less with those of Giddens and other theorists who pay more attention to individual agency and more with Foucault's focus on the power of discourse. In particular, I wished to foreground contemporary discourses in higher education in which neo-liberal managerialism is eroding professional autonomy and rebalancing power instead towards fulfilment of students' expectations and desires. This context has led to discursive practices including systems to force accountability and policies which give power to those who gain knowledge through observation and methods of self-disciplining staff. Staff-student shadowing, as a form of institutional self-study and surveillance, seemed to provide a fruitful arena in which to draw on Foucault's key concepts.

Foucault's ideas have been applied in a multiplicity of ways in the field of organisational theory. The power of discourse and practice of surveillance, for example, are examined by Lyon in relation to human resource management, which he views as

*... a 'discourse' and a set of practices aimed at narrowing the gap between the capacity to work and its exercise. It produces knowledge that makes the work arena visible for governance purposes. In short, it is surveillance. Through its techniques, and, in digital times, its devices, HRM provides the means of making activities and individuals knowable and governable. (2007: p. 84)*

He further argues that

*To 'see' people, either literally in direct supervision, or metaphorically through knowledge contained in the file, is to create a power relation [...]. Individuals are constructed; identities are produced through these practices of power. (2007: p. 84)*

However, Lyon criticises Foucault in that he neglects individual agency and urges others to take into account both system and subject, '*institutional classification and self-classification*' (2007: p. 92) within information-hungry organisations. Gordon nevertheless develops Foucault's argument that there is no core self-identity because people's self-perceptions are formed through reflection on knowledge which has been '*socially constituted over time*' (2009: p. 267). Thus he argues that '*...actors in the presence of leaders behave with deference ... because leaders, over time, have come to be considered 'superior' to their followers*' (2009: p. 267). Gordon therefore shows how Foucault's ideas have relevance to organisations in which employees discipline themselves, through their own self-construction, to behave in ways which 'fit' with bureaucratic hierarchies in order to achieve managerial aims. However, Clegg and Haugaard point out that managers are also employees and as such are '*the object of concerted campaigns aimed at their consciousness, including training, executive development, self-help manuals, culture programs, MBAs and so on ...*' (2009: p. 452).

The role of discourse in organisations is also examined by followers of Foucault. For example, Grant et al contend that organisations are constituted 'as

*structures of power and control'* (1998: p. 196) by means of discursive practices *'through which our identities, potentialities and fates are ineradicably fashioned and regulated'* (1998: p. 198). Drawing on research carried out by Kondo (1990) in a Japanese workplace, they argue that organisational discourses ensure *'that the formulation, communication and legitimation of organizational identity is never beyond the gaze and reach of power'* (1998: p. 200). Citing the work of Du Gay (1996), Grant et al show how the discourse of consumer sovereignty impacts upon organisational identities and employee behaviour.

*... driven by the need to ensure that all employees become dedicated to, indeed obsessed with, satisfying the requirements of the customer. They subject themselves to a new type of discursive and organizational rule that demands total conformity with its dictates within and outside the boundaries of the business enterprise. Moreover, this requires a remoulding of organizational identity around the highly complex and taxing emotional and symbolic work needed to keep the 'sovereign customer' happy.* (1998: p. 203)

These Foucaultian approaches to organisational theory therefore stress the roles of managerial and consumerist discourses and how these create a network of power, with those in authority using surveillance to bring about self-discipline among workers so that they conform to normalising standards in their everyday practice.

Foucault's 'toolbox' has also been used by researchers and writers to consider aspects of higher education, particularly in relation to pedagogy and management practices. Brenner (2006), for example, addresses issues of assessment of teaching by students, assessment through performance reviews (or appraisals) and peer or line manager observation in the classroom. He suggests that the classroom is in danger of becoming a panopticon, with the threat of surveillance stifling innovation or dissent in pedagogy. Drawing on Foucault's concepts of self-discipline and normalisation, he argues *'...we who teach and research risk becoming, like those who manage our institutions, a bit too reasonable, diplomatic or conciliatory'* (2006: p. 18). Instead, he argues for contestation and critical pedagogy, recognising the *'socialized identity as the materialized effect of discourse'* (2006: p. 15) but also the possibility of challenging discourse through subjectification and resistance. Vargas (1999), who studied women of colour teaching in predominantly white universities in



the USA, concurred with this possibility, drawing on Foucault to argue that individuals can act as vehicles for transmitting wider power, and that change at this micro-level must occur in order for the state apparatus and wider discourse to change – thus emphasizing the dispersal of power relations from top to bottom and vice versa.

Like Vargas, Harris also researched academics' racial identity, but in a religious university in the USA, examining through a Foucaultian lens *'how institutional norms are enforced through surveillance and self-discipline...'* (2011: p. 545). Her study revealed how participants *'disciplined themselves to fit university norms and censored themselves when they began to exercise agency'*. This seemed to be primarily because academics had to sign a contract on appointment to agree to conform to 'lifestyle standards'. She points out that although resistance to norms in this setting was possible in theory, in practice *'an emotional cost may be the result'* (2011: p. 558). She also reflects on insider research as a form of surveillance and questions what participants did not say as well as what they did say.

Other writers have taken Foucault's focus on the importance of discourse and applied it to higher education contexts. Saltmarsh (2011) discusses the way in which the discourse of marketisation encourages students to see themselves as clients, investing in their future employability by making use of a service provided by educators. This self-construction of *'economic subjectivities'* is said by Saltmarsh (2011: p. 116) to disrupt the discourse of education so that students become *'consumers of education, rather than as participants in learning'* (2011: p. 123). However, Saltmarsh goes on to argue that resistance is possible through challenging this economic discourse and experimenting with pedagogy which engages students in *'deconstructing the conditions of their own learning'* (2011: p. 133). Varman et al (2011), in their study of a business school in India, concur with Saltmarsh's analysis and argue that the project of putting student satisfaction at the heart of higher education illustrates *'how a project of "student voice" gets mired in power relationships and becomes a project of control'* (2011: p. 1166).

Foucaultian analysis is used by Broadhead and Howard (1998) to examine the introduction of the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) in UK higher education (since replaced by the Research Excellence Framework). They contend that universities are increasingly operating in a context of management-centred discipline and that the RAE acts as a vehicle to make academics discipline themselves to conduct only research which is judged to be useful to the economy and broader society. This, they argue, is a form of surveillance requiring compliance, co-operation and consent, integrated with reward for the most successful institutions and individuals, and punishment - through withdrawal of funding - for others.

Foucault's ideas have therefore been widely tested by theorists in the field of organisational theory and in relation to higher education specifically. However, in applying his thinking these theorists have also exposed what they identify as weaknesses in his ideas. Key areas of challenge to Foucault include his failure to explain the processes through which discourse becomes established and his unwillingness to ascribe power to human agents. Critics of Foucault highlight difficulties in applying his ideas in practice because, although Foucault shows how the power of discourse shapes individuals, he does not account for voluntaristic actions on the part of agents and how these can alter discourse and power structures (Gaventa, 2003; Courpasson and Dany, 2009; Grant et al, 1998). Lyon (2007), although agreeing with Foucault that individual identities are produced through power relations, draws on Goffman (1961) to argue that people will find ways of thwarting the intentions of bureaucracies. Courpasson and Dany (2009) expand on the way workers can actively contest managerial decisions, describing a case study in which an employee who resigned, due to conflicts between expected behaviour at work and his own personal values, had a direct impact on generating new thinking among his younger colleagues. They refer to this as *'affirmative resistance: officially claiming the superior legitimacy of given values without wanting to engage in a political struggle against competing values'* (2009: p. 335).

Giddens (1984) argues for the importance of agency, seeing the structures of power both as constraints on individuals and also as generative of power and resistance. Thus power structures are created through agency and at the same

time influence individual behaviours. As Giddens puts it, *'the structural properties of social systems exist only in so far as forms of social conduct are reproduced chronologically across time and space'* (1984: p.xxi). The key challenge made by Foucault's critics is therefore that he fails to recognise that power must be located somewhere and is not only a relationship but is also controlled either by groups or individuals (Thompson, 1993).

The analysis of staff-student shadowing which follows critically relates findings to Foucault's key ideas. It focuses on three themes:

- discursive forces which led to the establishment of the scheme
- the degree to which discourse seemed to be internalised by participants and the disciplinary effects of discourse and power relations on staff and students
- points of resistance, exploring the differing perceptions of participants in relation to their positions within the hierarchical structure of the University

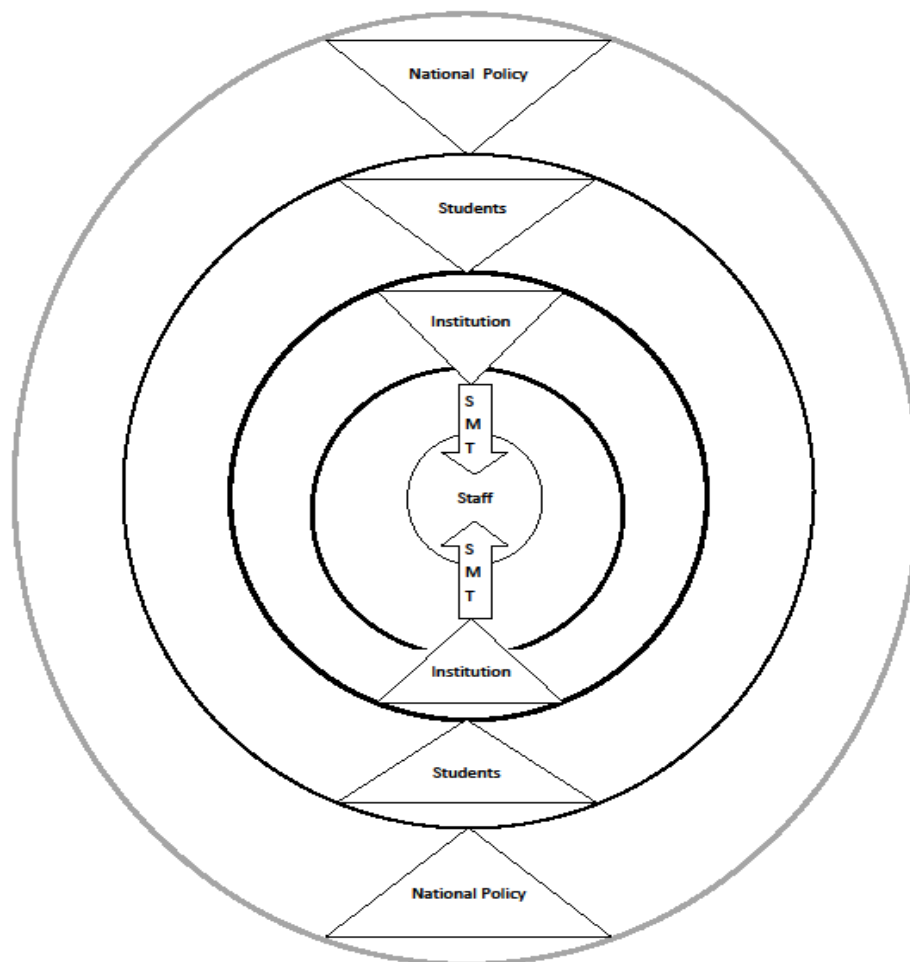
My general approach was inductive, categorizing generalizations which emerged from the data into these three themes, rather than hypothesizing them in advance, following Glaser's (1978) process of constant comparison.

### ***Discourse***

Figure 12 shows forces at work in higher education emanating from the discursive forces of neo-liberalism and consumerisation, with the resulting shift in balance of power towards students. The wider policy context, which has introduced the mechanisms of the market and positioned students as paying customers, has created pressures on universities via the power exerted by students. Student power manifests itself through satisfaction scores in national surveys and other forms of feedback. Pressures felt by universities include the imperative to increase institutional self-knowledge, to monitor and enhance quality and to develop staff in ways which put the needs of students first, or in more cynical terms to create a 'service mentality' which will then feed through into student satisfaction scores. At the institutional level, members of the Senior Management Team (SMT) use their power to ensure that policies and systems are created which drive managers to implement changes and inculcate behaviours in their staff which will achieve these aims. In Foucault's terms,

power is therefore dispersed throughout the system with top-down forces from national policy and bottom-up capillary power flowing from students and their satisfaction needs. The whole network is then caught in the web of market discourse.

**Figure 12: Pressures exerted on universities by increased marketisation of HE**



The shadowing scheme was adopted by the senior management team at Winchester because it was seen as an example of good practice in institutional self-study, which had potential to enhance staff understanding of the needs of students and thence bring about improvements in meeting them. It is likely also that it was a way of signalling the University's desire to increase engagement

with students. At around the same time as the scheme was introduced the senior management team had initiated a poster campaign across the campus with the slogan 'It's All About You', promoting the message that the University wished to listen to students and respond to their needs. This message was clearly visible to staff as well as students, so it is possible to take a Foucaultian perspective and argue that the campaign was partly designed to discipline staff in line with consumerist discourse, creating social quiescence (Gaventa, 2003). Strong drivers for these initiatives came from the Government's decision to withdraw a significant proportion of its funding for higher education, with students' deferred tuition fees replacing the lost income in the form of Government loans paid direct to universities. This effectively places students in the position of customers, with greater personal financial investment in their university experience, albeit in a relationship in which the 'product' they buy is shaped by their own work. This view was illustrated by the student who stated gave her reason for volunteering to participate as *'I am a great believer that students should be treated with respect and be appreciated as customers by the University'*. However, this perspective was not explicit in reasons given by other students.

Allied to this consumerist discourse is a shift in the balance of power towards students, who are able to make public their judgements on the quality of experience 'delivered' by their university via the National Student Survey, amongst other means. Thus student feedback gives them more power to influence developments, eroding to some degree the autonomy of universities and their staff in making local decisions. While some regard this new relationship as a healthy form of staff-student partnership, others see it as intrusive and integral to a growing culture of external auditing and surveillance which is increasingly common across the public sector as a means of justifying public expenditure. As the National Student Survey has a particular focus on student experience of their programmes of study, the aptness of Brenner's (2006) caution that the classroom risks becoming a panopticon is clear. Despite the purpose of the scheme being to observe students, some shadowers reported that lecturers seemed nervous or awkward, obviously responding to a feeling of being observed.

The overall context for the introduction of the shadowing scheme was therefore two-fold. Firstly, there was a perceived need perceived by the senior management team to understand what aspects of students' daily lives were satisfactory and what deficits existed, this being linked to the University's values statement '*individuals matter*' and to government policy creating an increasingly competitive environment in higher education. While there was abundant data at aggregate levels from internal and external student surveys, the senior management team took the view that shadowing could provide a complementary form of feedback to give a fuller picture. Secondly, the scheme was seen as a vehicle for bringing about staff development in that gaining a better understanding of students' experience at first-hand could contribute to individuals' ability to respond to students' needs, leading to better satisfaction scores. Thus Lyon (2009), Gordon (2009) and Clegg and Haugaard (2009) would relate the staff development purpose of the scheme to Foucault's notion of technologies of the self. By participating in the scheme shadowers were '*the object of concerted campaigns aimed at their consciousness*' (Clegg and Haugaard, 2009: p. 452). Given that data on student satisfaction is increasingly being used to create university league tables in order to inform student choice, the logical conclusion is therefore that the power of market forces and discourse of neo-managerialism strongly influenced the introduction of staff-student shadowing.

Ng and Forbes argue that a political system orientated towards giving more power to students allows administrators to '*wield the baton of the market, empowered to "educate" and "enlighten" academics on being progressive and market oriented*' (2009: p. 55). One way in which this may be enacted by managers is through securing affective commitment from staff, ensuring that they adapt to students' needs by moderating their attitudes and behaviours, thus strengthening the relationship between higher education institutions and their students (Bowden, 2011). Bowden argues that universities should adopt a relationship-marketing approach in which all members of institution play a part. From the perspective of the shadowing scheme, it might be argued that relationships built up between shadowers and students had increased affective commitment. It was clear from interviews, and from my own shadowing, that participants had increased their respect for students and lecturers, for example,

*'I was pretty impressed with all our academic staff. I thought they were all brilliant in the things I went to' (PSSM); 'I was impressed by the high interest level of the participants in the sessions' (ASM); 'The lecturers were great and it made me think "this is what I work for"' (PSMM). However, viewing the scheme through a Foucaultian lens, the 'regime of truth' and operation of power would shape such affective commitment in the interests of management and macro-political discursive forces, eroding the possibility of resistance to a consumerist discourse.*

### ***Effects of discourse and power relations on participants***

Some professional services managers argued that it might be risky to involve more junior staff in shadowing in future iterations of the scheme, because they may say inappropriate things to students.

*I guess you know at a senior level you are expecting them to have a bit more responsibility and understanding of those things. I'm not saying that people who aren't senior don't have that as well, but if you had it as a sort of free-for-all there might be scope there for people getting upset. (PSSM)*

This illustrates a point made by Ng and Forbes (2009) who contend that employees must not only be trained well but also trusted, as the relationship between 'service employee' and consumer may be a more significant factor in determining customer satisfaction than the service that is actually delivered. From a Foucaultian perspective this 'training' would constitute the production of 'docile bodies', created through a 'network of discourses' (Ball, 1990: p. 165) which determine unwritten rules about what can be voiced, who can speak and with what authority (Mills, 2003). It could be argued that some of the views expressed by some senior managers appear to portray the value of shadowing as a form of disciplinary power needed to fashion the subjectivities of staff in line with managerial discourse (Fejes, 2008; Usher and Solomon, 1999) in order to better service students' needs and their subjectivities as investors in their future employability (Saltmarsh, 2011).

*I think it's important for middle managers to do it because they need to know what service standards they've got to deliver and what are the problems with their customers particularly – I mean that's a real issue for us because we're a service department. (PSSM)*

The view that less senior staff might not be trusted to undertake shadowing in a professional manner may resonate with the notion of an academic/support staff divide which has featured in response to staff surveys and in the literature (Rowland, 2002; Deem, 1998).

The shadowing scheme can be seen in Foucault's terms as a non-coercive form of discipline (Nicoll and Harrison, 2003) for all staff who participated. The scheme was designed to encourage shadowers to reflect on how they might use new insights to bring about self-development or improvements, either in the way they carried out their own functions and roles or by influencing changes in services provided by others. However, differences in the status and power of participants resulted in different types of approaches when reflecting on how they might effect change. Some senior academic managers tended to focus on what they identified as staff development needs relating to learning and teaching. Their roles and responsibilities meant they could tackle these in a systemic way, for example by introducing general forms of staff development within Faculties or by bringing groups of academics together to discuss proposed improvements – *'We don't want this to be seen as another management tool to fix things, but could be more of a means to exchange ideas about good teaching practices'* (ASM). Senior staff also had more power to take immediate action to solve problems themselves (for example swift return of delayed feedback on assignments), or to bring issues to the attention of staff to whom they could delegate action – for example in response to observing problems with computers in an open-access area one senior manager stated *'I've now got [...] to look for a systemic way of identifying the PCs – we've got people going around, walking the floors now, checking them'*. In this way knowledge gained through 'surveillance' via shadowing enhanced the power of senior staff to discipline and create new ways of working through processes of staff development, resonating with Lyon's (2009) contention that human resource management aims to make work visible, knowable and governable. Less senior staff also took actions to bring about change but these tended to be more tentative, reflecting their status, such as offering to help others - *'I just had a chat and said if you want me to come along and talk about it then I'm more than happy to do so'* or simply feeding back to colleagues *'it's obviously helped us in feeding back into our sort of plans of how we do things'*.



The degree of power wielded by those with different levels of status also affected the motivations of participants. Those with non-academic roles or in more junior positions were generally more interested in the environment and infrastructure for learning and teaching, while senior academic managers chose to focus on learning and teaching itself in relation to specific programmes of study or particular types of student. This was aligned more clearly among non-academic participants to a discourse of consumerisation - that students are paying customers - and a stronger belief, somewhat contrary to the aims I had set out, that the main purpose of the scheme was to identify problems which could be rectified - so in effect a form of quality control and compliance through self-discipline, for example *'... staff need to be challenged in what they do... so if they go there and they have a particular interest and they think 'that's wrong, we need to completely re-address how we deal with a certain aspect of service' or something, then that's partly staff development and quality control'* (PSMM).

### ***Points of resistance***

The scheme's protocols were explicit in stating that its purpose was to explore students' experience rather than to judge the quality of lecturing. When seeking consent from lecturers to allow shadowers to accompany students to their sessions I made this policy very clear by attaching the protocols for shadowers to my request. I was aware of the highly sensitive political context surrounding lecture observation which largely dated from an attempt by the national employers forum for post-92 universities in 1991-2 to insist that observation should be a compulsory part of appraisal for lecturers. The lecturing union at that time refused to agree, thereby forfeiting 1% of the annual pay rise (Allen, 2002). As a long-standing member of teaching and lecturing unions myself, I fully understood the context, but was also subject to the power of that membership and the discourse of collective responsibility it entails. As Foucault points out, power relations extend both downwards and upwards. One very clear way in which power can permeate upwards is through union structures.

Research into the views of lecturers on peer-observation of teaching, carried out in 3 higher education institutions by the National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education, showed that their concerns

*... focused on potential links with forms of performance measurement and appraisal, and the fear that observation outcomes might be used for managerial purposes such as selection for redundancy. Concerns were also expressed that observation disrupted the professional relationship between lecturers and students. (Allen, 2002: p. 2)*

These views relate to peer-observation, but in the case of the shadowing scheme senior academics chose to shadow students within their own Faculties, so the lecturers whose sessions they attended, or wished to attend, were subordinates. It is likely that they made this choice because insights into students in their own Faculties would be more useful in generating ideas which could be translated into action.

In the course of seeking consent for senior academics to attend lectures I received one refusal. Interestingly this was from a lecturer who had also declined in the pilot on the basis that they were very new to teaching in higher education and not yet ready to have an observer. Although this lecturer had stated at that stage that they would be very happy to receive a shadower into a session in future in practice, when asked again, they refused because they were being observed more formally during the year as part of a teaching qualification assessment. Clearly this lecturer was unconvinced by my assurance that the purpose of shadowing was not about surveillance and making judgements about lecturing.

During the pilot a lecturer refused to admit me as a shadower. By chance, this lecturer was teaching a student being shadowed as part of the full scheme. When seeking consent a second time there was no refusal. I cannot be certain about the reason for the change of heart as I felt it would be unethical to ask and the protocols made it clear that there was no obligation to agree. Perhaps it was something to do with my relative seniority, as the second shadower was a middle manager from a professional service department. It could also have related (either positively or negatively) to the nature of the personal relationships between the lecturer and the students being shadowed, or to a range of other possible factors relating to the student group, the topic being taught, or simply how the lecturer was feeling on the day they were asked. Nevertheless, as consent-seeking in itself could be construed as a form of

surveillance (with refusal open to negative interpretations), I was mindful of Harris's research among teacher educators and her reflection on '*... what else participants did not say as a result of surveillance*' (2011: p. 16).

McMahon et al (2007) point out that by definition teaching is an observed activity (although new forms of technology may render that definition less clear). As noted in Chapter Seven, one senior academic shadower commented in discussion that if a lecturer refused consent it may be because they had something to hide – implying that there might be something 'weak' about their ability. However, McMahon et al note that in peer observation schemes '*Concern about the content of third-party observation reports being seen by superior others is not confined to those whose teaching skills leave much to be desired*' (2007: p. 504). Issues of power and resistance are deeply embedded in views held about observation of lecturing, and despite doing as much as I could to explain that the shadowing scheme was not designed in order for shadowers to judge lecturers, there was clearly a degree of mistrust on the part of some lecturers who may have been worried about what might be reported and to whom. McMahon et al (2007), in describing problems relating to peer observation of lecturers, point out that boundaries are permeable and there may still be disparities in power between observer and observee. Bearing this in mind, it is probable that even when a more junior member of staff (perhaps from professional services) entered a lecture for the purpose of shadowing, the fact that their observations would be reported to me, and that the scheme was set up at the instigation of senior management, meant that power relations were weighted in favour of the shadower with, in a sense, no 'right of reply' for the lecturer other than to refuse consent.

Senior academic participants were troubled by the notion that the scheme might be perceived as a way of monitoring quality, while at the same time wrestling with dilemmas about how difficult it was to avoid making spoken or unspoken judgements about the quality of teaching. Their concerns particularly related to the issue of whether or not to intervene and use the power of their positions to share critical comments or suggestions with lecturers.

*I was there shadowing the student, I was not there to comment on the teaching technique of the members of staff, and so therefore it's left me*

*with this dilemma about how, when you shadow, you deal with something that you don't think is quite right (ASM).*

In addition the power implicit in their status created real dilemmas about how to deal with anticipated expectations from lecturers that they would voice judgements, either positive or critical, once a teaching session ended. Alcoff asserts that in qualitative research *'Who is speaking to whom turns out to be as important for meaning and truth as what is said ...'* (2009: p. 121). Although not research per se, in the shadowing scheme it could be said that who does *not* speak to whom is as important, for as illustrated in Chapter Seven, at least one senior academic shadower identified difficulties in deciding whether to comment to lecturers at all after their sessions, as any comment could be interpreted as a judgement – *'It's very hard to be in a room and not formulate an opinion [...] But then you have to think well what would the member of staff think if you don't say anything?'* (ASM). This concern to maintain balance between, on the one hand, protecting professional autonomy of lecturers and, on the other hand, participating in a scheme which could be perceived as quality monitoring, might be interpreted as individual agency resisting the discursive forces of neo-liberal managerialism and the culture of accountability, resulting in a conflict of values.

Another concern voiced by shadowers was a sense of impotence and lack of power to address problems they had identified, particularly difficulties experienced by students. Again, this was not a stated aim of shadowing and there was no requirement built into the scheme for any action to be taken. However, participants clearly felt a personal responsibility to students and to the institution and were reluctant to simply observe and note problems. While senior staff had the power to devise strategies or delegate actions to others to rectify problems, less senior staff felt they had power only to take action over local or minor issues. and this was a source of frustration for them. One non-academic participant who had observed his shadowing partner struggling with work set in class expressed his frustration in these terms *'I understand that people don't like to be criticised, even if it's constructive sometimes. But at the end of the day it's about the student experience, and if they are having a bad experience and we can't change that then it's never going to get any better'*. For both groups suspension of power and action in order simply to observe and learn was a fundamental problem, compounded by the 'rules' which meant

there was no linkage between shadowing and other systematised methods of feedback. The effect of this was that differences in interpretation and approach emerged at the level of the individual according to how much power they felt their status gave them and how willing they were to use it. Comparing two senior managers at more or less the same level within the management structure, while one felt empowered for '*finding out about things that are not right and fixing them*', the other reflected more cautiously, expressing concern '*about what it is you do with that knowledge ... it's very arbitrary – what you've seen, what you've experienced – that troubles me*'. The first of these was a professional services senior manager, while the second was academic, possibly suggesting that those who have progressed through an academic career into management might be more sensitive to the discourse of professional autonomy.

Interestingly several professional services senior managers made explicit judgements on what was observed in lectures, as the following questionnaire responses reveal.

*Poor timekeeping by some students disrupted lectures. Academic staff should be encouraged to clamp down on it [...] He went back over some stuff they had missed and allowed them to vote on which project to adopt even though they had not been there to hear the proposals.*  
(PSSM)

*All groups presented well but I found the level of critique from the lecturer about the presentations to be a little unbalanced.* (PSSM)

However, I had told staff that responses to the questionnaire would be anonymous and I have no reason to assume that the scheme's protocols were breached – for example by participants sharing their judgements with others. Nevertheless, these responses illustrate how the subjectivity of non-academic managers is shaped by different frames of reference when interpreting relations between academic staff and students.

Although students were asked to state their reasons for volunteering to be shadowed it is unclear overall from the range of responses (Figure 3) whether they felt it would empower them in some way, or whether they saw themselves as 'customers' whose needs would be served via the scheme. However, four

students explicitly stated that they wished to help the University research their experience so that improvements could be made. From this I infer that they felt their participation would be a mechanism for exerting pressure for change which would be beneficial to students. In terms of the self-interest of participating students, one shadower who had participated in the pilot and also in the full scheme reported that both their student partners had seemed under the impression they could use their relationship with the shadower to help them sort out any problems they might have after the scheme had finished - *'... the student I had shadowed in the first year and her friend came up because [...] there was something they hadn't been able to sort. So they then came specifically to see me to see if I could sort it'* (ASM). As the shadower was sensitive to the ethical issues this raised, and keen not to allow students privileged access which crossed boundaries and protocols set out in the scheme, such additional empowerment was not granted.

Nevertheless, this does raise an important issue about fairness. Those students who feel confident enough to volunteer to be shadowed might already be those who make their voices heard through other means, while those who lack confidence to talk with senior staff, or do not feel they have the (albeit small) amount of extra time available to meet with a shadower, may find they are relatively disempowered and their experiences marginalised. Similarly, some shadowers may be more careful than others about maintaining boundaries in continuing relations with their shadowing partners and therefore how empowered students are as a result. As Jackson and Mazzei point out, *'Power relations are specific to subjects who are in mutual relations with one another'* (2012: pp. 6-7), thus aligning with those writers who believe that individual agency has greater importance for power relations than Foucault allows.

I needed to use my powers of persuasion to encourage staff participation in the scheme and to engage shadowers in reflecting on what they had learned, including giving up time to be interviewed about their experience. While the former was arguably in the self-disciplining interests of shadowers because it was in line with what the senior management team wanted, the latter was not a requirement and I relied on good will. Brannick and Coghlan argue that to maintain their credibility, insider action researchers must be politically aware so

that they can balance *'the organization's formal justification of what it wants in the project with their own tacit personal justification'* (2007: p. 71). They assert the importance of keeping in mind the *'power and interests of relevant stakeholders'* (2007: p. 71). Key considerations for me, therefore, were how to maintain my independence as a researcher while running a scheme which had the clear backing of the senior management team, and how to negotiate the politics of a context in which some might perceive shadowing to be the exercise of managerial power through spying and a way of disciplining staff to comply with the discourse of student consumerism.

In considering the relationships between my role as insider researcher and the field of power relations in which the shadowing scheme was situated, I drew on the work of Costley et al (2010) and Brannick and Coghlan (2007). Costley et al caution that insider researchers may be over-familiar with the setting and therefore *'fail to recognize the subtleties of power relationships in operation, or mis-read the dynamics of your own interrelationships with those senior and junior to you'* (2010: p. 122). In my own case I was not only a researcher, but I had also set up the shadowing scheme itself (at the behest of the senior management), including the protocols and modus operandi. I therefore had a duty to try and minimise the effects on findings of my powerful position so that as true a picture as possible of the perceived benefits and concerns emerged. I was aware that participants who were drawn from the senior management team may wish to assert their own power to stress the benefits of the scheme, while others may be more critical. On the other hand, those lower in the hierarchy might discipline themselves to be less critical about shadowing because they knew the initiative had stemmed from senior management. The network of power relations embedded in the scheme would therefore always serve as a challenge to its neutrality, opening possibilities for resistance to its outcomes.

In reflecting on relationships between Foucault's ideas and my research into staff-student shadowing, I was cognisant of Kendall and Wickham's warning that *'Foucault's books are specific histories of specific objects, not recipes for those interested in (half-) baking accounts of the meaning of modern life'* (1999:119). They stress that it is important not to attempt to give overarching meaning to local events. Kendall and Wickham's writing on schooling concludes that

classrooms are sites where cultural practices and subjectivities are produced gradually and in response to specific circumstances and chance. I therefore wished to draw on Foucault's ideas to gain insights in a local setting, examining power dimensions and the role of discourse in a single scheme in a single institution. My aim was to use Foucault's 'toolbox' to gain deeper understanding of the meanings of participants, including myself. Perceptions of the 'value' of student shadowing and responses to this new initiative were therefore bracketed by my reflection on power relations as they seemed to play out in the scheme.

However, my study of power relations was constrained by a range of factors. At the outset, the scheme was an initiative which stemmed from the senior management team. I was *asked* to set it up but *chose* to do so as an action research project situated within a Foucaultian framework. As such, my research was always likely to be compromised by my position in the University's hierarchy. Although not in the ranks of senior management, I was acting on their behalf in setting up the scheme and was therefore in a powerful position in relation to those who participated. Even though some participants were in the senior management team, my agency as a researcher, in a university which values research, gave me significant freedom to ask questions and interpret responses, thus gaining a degree of power which I would not otherwise have had. Nevertheless, I could not probe as deeply into the interplay of power relations in the scheme as I might have wished. As part of my day to day role I needed to make the scheme work, so could not risk compromising it through excessive critique. I was therefore, in Foucault's terms, disciplining myself to conform to a hierarchical structure in which management decisions take priority and the discourse of student satisfaction shapes those decisions.

The power positions of participants limited the extent to which I could elicit deeper meanings from them and assess the value of the scheme. For example, when considering the influence of discourse, I asked participants why they had volunteered to participate in the scheme. No staff stated in the questionnaire survey that a concern for student satisfaction was a motivating factor. However, this did emerge implicitly during interviews. Four of the five staff who brought up the importance of student satisfaction were in more senior roles than me.



This indicated to me that discourses of student consumerism and marketisation had shaped their thinking and subjectivities. However, it was improbable that they would take different positions when being interviewed by a less senior member of staff, thus I could not gauge to what extent they might be showing only surface compliance (Linstead, 1993) and therefore perhaps resistance to discursive forces. Similarly, those who were less senior than me may have felt they needed to foreground student satisfaction in their responses, so it is perhaps unsurprising that this featured in discussions with two such staff, for example *'I know the student experience is becoming ... it is the single most important thing isn't it...'* (PSMM).

When reflecting on the influence that power positions may have had on the operation of the scheme and the views of those who participated, I searched for evidence of resistance. The first manifestation, as noted earlier in this chapter, was refusal by two lecturers to have a shadower in their classrooms. However, I could not conclude that this was, in a Foucaultian sense, a starting point for resistance against managerialist discourse within the University. Nor could it be classified, from an anti-Foucault stance, as voluntaristic subjective action in the form of *'affirmative resistance'* (Courpasson and Dany, 2009:335). This was because I was prevented by the protocols I had set up for the scheme from probing the reasons for refusal as, when seeking consent, I had explicitly stated in my email:

*I'm attaching the staff protocols so you can see what is expected from the shadower. You will see from these that permission must be granted by you, via me, before any definite arrangement can be made. I have agreed with UCU that 'shadows' may only visit lectures/seminars where staff have given explicit permission.*

There was also some evidence of friction between 'surveillance' aspects of shadowing and the professional values and subjectivity of senior academic shadowers. This took the form of individual dilemmas about how to respond to lecturers without seeming to be making judgements about quality. For one participant in particular this led to concern about the conceptualisation of the scheme and the notion that it could *'... just become a tool, potentially a dangerous other tool ... and I was very conscious of the fact that it could be seen as being another way of spying on staff ...'* (ASM). There was evidence of general

concern among academic participants not to be seen to exert their power directly by speaking with lecturers about problems observed during shadowing or turning it into observation by management '*... the line between management and being there to experience it from the student's side is very, very difficult to draw*' (ASM). Instead they preferred to deal with issues indirectly through more systematic processes which would not single out individual lecturers. Applying Foucault's ideas to these findings has limitations. Those who follow Foucault might argue that these responses result from the self-identities of university academics, shaped by a discourse of professional autonomy. On the other hand, they might be categorised as humanistic responses, with shadowers simply not wishing to upset or embarrass those who have willingly consented to their presence in lectures.

A final challenge in applying Foucault's thinking to my research arose through my own participation in shadowing. As noted in Chapter Seven, I had an experience of shadowing in which a lecturer regularly made reference to me and in which I was asked to explain my presence to the student group at the outset. On reflection I believe the behaviour of the lecturer was designed (perhaps unconsciously) to ensure that students would not see me as a 'monitor' (especially as younger students have become accustomed to inspection regimes in schools and further education colleges). I had to explain to the students that I was present in order to shadow a student, not to observe the lecturer. In this sense it may be argued that Foucault's ideas have limited application, for as Grant et al state, his thinking

*... refuses to recognize that the world consists of natural and social objects possessing essential or in-built capacities for acting on and through that world which cannot be reduced to the, self-disciplining, discursive constructions of enterprising or calculating selves. (1998:212)*

In this instance the lecturer was an active agent, taking control of the situation in line with Hacking's belief that '*each person learns to behave whether by concealing one's feelings, by affirming one's central role or by a tactical effacement*' (2004: p. 294), not simply a 'docile body' compliantly participating in a managerially initiated scheme.

Applying Foucault's ideas to my study of the staff-student shadowing scheme has provided meaningful insights into the role of discourse in shaping the scheme and the subjectivities of participants. However, his writings do not focus on the power of agency or the extent to which individuals can and do resist discursive forces (Mills, 2003). Furthermore, his ideas changed over time and can be interpreted in different ways, with Foucault himself stating that he wrote in order to change himself and not to uniformly apply general theories to different fields (Foucault, 1978b).

## **Chapter Nine**

### **Reflection on Research Methods**

I was aware, as a work-based researcher, of the dangers inherent in researching participants' views and feelings about a project which I had myself set up and in which I was also taking part. Chapter Eight has outlined the nexus of power relations surrounding the genesis of the shadowing scheme, the drivers for staff and students to participate, relationships between staff and students, and relationships between participants and myself. This power-web forced me to approach the research project with constant self-surveillance, taking care not to drift into false assumptions about the possibility of objectivity in methodologies and interpretation of findings. However, while my subjectivity had the potential to distort and contaminate the findings, my closeness to the setting and my own participation in shadowing enabled me to probe more deeply and obtain greater insights into the scheme's operation, value and problems.

Hannabuss argues that ethnographic research requires the presence of the researcher in the text and that this

*... presents particular problems, of objectivity and emotional distance, of differentiation between observer and observed, of skill in distancing self from experience, of writing things up dispassionately. Nevertheless, we 'are there', doing research in the field, in an organisation. (2000: p. 101)*

Referring to the bias and perceptions that researchers bring with them, he concurs with Mitchell who states '*researchers must also be sensitive to the fact that they also bring to the discussion understandings that are products of their own personal, individual, and collective histories, experiences, and actions*' (2009: p. 93). There were ways in which my background and previous experiences influenced the research, both in terms of the shadowing I undertook myself and in how I conducted interviews. During shadowing I could not completely distance what I was observing from my previous experiences as both teacher/lecturer and as a student. Earlier in my career I had been responsible for training new teachers and had spent hundreds of hours observing classes for the purpose of assessing standards and giving feedback. I had also been a

quality reviewer in further education colleges. This 'baggage' meant I could not dispassionately distance myself from making judgements, albeit unspoken and internal to myself. Similarly I found myself observing my student partners and wishing I could give them advice about tackling an assignment, with my thoughts partly filtered through my gaze as a teacher and also as a current doctoral student. Hannabuss contends that in conducting qualitative research the researcher may be tempted into *'reminiscence rather than record-keeping'*, taking the opportunity to *'impose a retrospective order on a set of often-disordered events and impressions'* (2000: p. 101). This was often uppermost in my mind as I tried to look afresh at the lecture room experience, almost attempting to merge myself into my shadowing partner's subjectivity and trying not to let my own teacher/student background intrude. Recognizing the impossibility of this feat one could argue that for me, and for all other participants, shadowing was 'tainted' by personal backgrounds for *'personal values and interpretations interfere with getting an all-round picture which includes the perspectives of others'* (Lomax, 1994: p. 163). In this sense, therefore, my participation in shadowing mirrored the context for all other shadowers in that they also constructed meanings built on personal foundations of experience and values. All our insights and understandings were to a large extent products of *'personal, individual, and collective histories, experiences, and actions'* (Mitchell, 2009: p. 93).

However, Somekh argues that *'The self can be said to be a 'research instrument' and action researchers need to be able to take into account their own subjectivity as an important component of meaning making'* (2006: p. 14). Shadowers were constantly comparing their own prior experiences and understandings with what they observed during the period of shadowing. In essence this was the point of the scheme – to unlearn misconceptions or understandings about student experience which may be based on myths or historical personal experiences and instead to reconstruct a sense of student experience in the here and now. My role in researching reflections and outcomes for participants was to capture what aspects of their shadowing experience had triggered changes in perceptions or behaviour, while remaining sensitive to the different 'starting points' and backgrounds of individuals. I was also mindful of wider discourses influencing my own reflections and those of others, and the greater or lesser

significance of these discourses according to role and seniority of participants. Mitchell describes the challenges this presents for the researcher, who must '*be a student of the discourses that inform the voices of their participants but also to be sensitive to the ways that their own membership in differing discursive communities inform their analysis of their participants' experiences*' (2009: p. 93). An example where this issue played out in practice was how my own history of membership of a discursive community of teachers and lecturers (and membership of an academic trade union) had led to a strong belief in professional autonomy and thus a desire not to see this eroded by managerialist 'quality monitoring'. I felt protective of academic colleagues who may have shadowers visiting their lectures and had therefore set up clear expectations and protocols about consent-giving. My assumption that others would share this viewpoint was generally true, but it became clear that some participants held different perspectives, instead positing that lecturers should be *expected* to give their consent, or that they perhaps had something to hide if they did not.

Several participants and others who were aware of the scheme questioned the validity of shadowing (and implicitly, therefore, my research) as a means of eliciting a 'student experience' from which any universal lessons could be learned. However, I had not set up the scheme or my research with this purpose in mind. From these critics' viewpoint students had volunteered to be shadowed so variables such as social characteristics or academic ability had not been controlled. Similarly they could have argued that there was no pre-determined selection of events to be shadowed, as this was left to shadowing partners to negotiate and much depended on availability of partners and their opportunity to find mutually convenient times. I learned from this criticism that I could have been even more careful in explicating the aims of the scheme than I had been and that this would have disabused those who espouse positivist approaches about its purpose and scope. Indeed, my research revealed that the *uniqueness* of students' characteristics, their programmes of study and the events which took place during shadowing, was identified by a number of shadowers as the main strength of the scheme, as it captured data which could never emerge through formal collective student feedback systems and could not be generalised to be representative of the student body as a whole. As one participant explained,

*We find it frustrating because there's a lot of store put on the NSS survey [...] and it's just one question which doesn't really answer anything, but we keep getting a low score on it. So you know we try our best to do things which we think are helping and obviously getting the right feedback from the students is important. (PSMM)*

Therefore, although comments made by shadowers could be seen by critics of the scheme as lacking rigour or objectivity, the data is rich and '*... in terms of capturing the way things happened, or appeared to have happened, this very richness is likely to include all kinds of extraneous elements or indeterminate and uncontrollable variables*' (Hannabuss, 2000: p. 101).

Nevertheless, my perceptions of the value of the shadowing scheme were open to challenge by others who might argue that because I had been responsible for setting it up I had a vested interest in demonstrating its worth. In reality I had been asked to set up the scheme by the Senior Management Team, so my sense of personal investment was moderated by this. It had also been my choice to make it the subject of a research project, and in so doing I had sought to identify issues and problems with the scheme, as well as any benefits. Siebert and Mills (2007) contend that work-based researchers facing challenges to the reliability of their research must develop strategies of resistance, arguing that this concurs with what Foucault believes is necessary to create knowledge. I therefore found it helpful to remind participants that I was an ex-lecturer and also a current member of the academic trade union on the occasional moments when I felt there could be a possibility that others might perceive me as an instrument of managerialism, rather than an academic researcher sharing common values and norms.

Kauffman describes the negotiation of relationships between researcher and participants as '*the local politics of research*' (1992: p. 188), with social characteristics and differences being recognized, or not recognized, by the individuals involved. When research is carried out by a work-based researcher, using colleagues as the subjects of research, these politics are magnified and compounded by status within the organisation. This can lead to response effects in which participants behave or comment in ways they believe are expected by the researcher (Costley et al, 2010). I needed to be constantly attuned to this

possibility. Responsibility for setting up the shadowing scheme had been given to me by the senior management team so it was tempting to feel I could distance myself from personal investment in particular outcomes from my research – for example if participants felt it had little value. However, it was entirely possible that participants would feel they had to report positively on their experiences in the scheme precisely because it had been initiated by senior management. Despite promises of anonymity in writing up findings, some participants might still be suspicious that I had a hidden agenda and that I might verbally break their trust in talking to others, particularly members of the senior management team. Similarly in undertaking shadowing I had found that the behaviour of a lecturer whose session I visited had been modified by my presence in such a way that my own behaviour was manipulated. This, of course, could have been mirrored in the experiences of other participants so that their responses to my interview questions, whilst reflecting what they believed to have been truthful representations of what they had observed ‘through the eyes of a student’ may actually have been quite different from typical events as experienced by their shadowing partners. Furthermore, it was difficult for me to judge the extent to which all shadowers had gone beyond ‘*conspicuous invisibility*’ (Quinlan, 2008) and become more actively engaged as some participants reported, for example in groupwork with students or in answering questions in class discussion, thus altering the dynamics of events and relationships. This conceptual fuzziness of shadowing is captured by Gill (2011) who suggests the term as misleading, because while it suggests non-participation and invisibility on the part of the shadower, with the shadowing partner passively accepting their presence, the reality may involve active engagement by both parties.

Might an inquiry into the value and outcomes of the shadowing scheme have been more valid if undertaken by an outsider (external to the University), or an insider who had not played a part in setting it up or participating in it? Such researchers may have prompted more critical views from interviewees as they may not have been perceived as tainted by any association with having set up the scheme as an ‘agent’ of the senior management team. However, if they had been employed at the instigation of senior management the association may perhaps have been even stronger. Nonetheless, not having participated



themselves they may have asked more 'naïve' questions, less loaded with assumptions about how others felt when shadowing students. Such questions might have opened up other avenues for discussion which I, with my first-hand experience and potential for bias, had not considered.

I cannot be sure how contaminated my findings were by my insider and instigator status, but I sense that my interpretations and insights were triangulated and strengthened by my own reflections as a shadowing participant. Active participation gave me a touchstone against which to formulate questions and compare the experiences of others. Insider knowledge of the University enabled me to contextualise responses and filter them through meshes of power, status and roles using Foucault's writings as a theoretical backdrop. Thus my interpretations took into account the different fields of vision and levels of focus of each participant as they attempted to see through the eyes of their student partners. However, as Ashwin (2009) cautions, the researcher's work in questioning and categorizing is influenced by their own conceptualisations and therefore must always be tentative and never 'complete'.

There is another sense, too, in which the research is incomplete. The memories and impressions of shadowers are not stagnant. My interviews with each participant took place within a few weeks of their experience, yet memories distort over time, with some aspects gaining greater significance than others and the recalling and re-telling of experience being a form of meaning-making itself (Atkinson and Rosiek, 2009). As I reflect on my own shadowing during the pilot – now more than two years distant – I find that my memories have crystallized into a series of images and key moments, rather than a holistic experience including the routine and hum-drum. I must seek out my notes to regain those impressions. One might argue that if participants engaged in shadowing regularly – perhaps every year – this would help to keep impressions and insights current. On the other hand it is also possible that frequency might lead to strengthening of pre-existing ideas about student experience, with participants consciously or unconsciously looking for features which reinforce previous insights. A key aim of the scheme was to deepen staff understanding of students' experience but I must ask myself to what extent my research captured any real long-term sustained change, especially in a rapidly changing context

where methods of learning and teaching are increasingly transformed by technology and the external environment creates drivers for curriculum change. The 'student experience' is not just unique to individuals but is also unique in the context of time and circumstances.

## **Conclusion**

I have taken two approaches to researching the shadowing scheme. Firstly, through action research, I was able to consider operational and ethical issues as designer and implementer of the scheme, with an assessment of outcomes for participants and the wider institution. Secondly by taking part in the shadowing myself, and through encouraging participants to reflect in-depth on their experiences, I took an ethnographical approach in order to probe ethical dimensions and the way in which power relations threaded throughout the scheme. I then reflected on findings from both approaches through the lens of Foucault, seeking insights which could inform future iterations, or deepen understanding, of staff-student shadowing within the University or elsewhere. My exploration has led me to some tentative conclusions in relation to my research questions, which were:

- What were the scheme's outcomes and perceived value?
- To what extent were outcomes dependent upon relations of power and status, including those between staff and students in the context of growing marketisation of higher education?
- Whose needs did the scheme serve and how?
- What ethical, methodological and micro-political issues emerged in running the shadowing scheme?
- How appropriate is the application of this limited form of 'corporate ethnography' in the context of a higher education institution?

This conclusion evaluates what my research revealed in relation to these questions, reflects on the value of the research and suggests how it could be useful to others who might set up similar schemes in future. I also consider what further research might contribute to deeper understanding of the value of staff-student shadowing, including other ways of gaining insights from the work of Foucault.

### **What were the scheme's outcomes and perceived value?**

This section of the conclusion summarises key findings from my study as action researcher in setting up, running and evaluating the shadowing scheme.

The aims of the shadowing scheme were to increase staff understanding of the daily experience of students and through this to suggest ways in which students' experience could be enhanced. Given the scope for the 'daily experience of students' to be defined and interpreted in range of ways, interviews with staff revealed that they used shadowing for slightly different purposes and this seemed to be closely related to their role and power to make improvements or bring about change. Senior academics tended to focus their shadowing on students' experience in formal learning environments such as lectures and seminars, although some also explored extra-curricular experiences through chatting informally with their partners. In addition, some academics had selected students with specific personal characteristics or studying particular types of programmes. Staff working in professional services roles tended to pay more attention to the infrastructure and processes supporting learning and teaching, particularly facilities and technology used within lectures and other teaching environments.

Staff participants were in agreement that shadowing did give them greater insight into students' daily experience and that they felt others should be encouraged to participate, particularly those whose roles do not bring them into regular contact with students, such as those in senior management or professional services. However, it is difficult to judge whether shadowing contributed to personal development in any sustained meaningful way, or whether new knowledge and insights were applied to their practice in order to bring about change in processes or actions. As Barnett points out *'Being armed with insight into ways of improving organizational culture and practices is one thing; bringing it off effectively is another'* (1997: p. 14).

Key to ensuring that benefits flow from shadowing is the quality of critical reflection that participants undertake. Moon defines reflection as *'a mental process with purpose and/or outcome [...] applied in situations where material is*

*ill-structured or uncertain in that it has no obvious solutions, a mental process that seems to be related to thinking and to learning'* (1999: p. 5). A difficulty with the way the shadowing scheme was conceptualised was that shadowers were not required to have specific outcomes or purposes in mind. It was clear from questionnaire responses and interviews that some shadowers chose to focus on the experiences of students who met certain criteria (student with a disability, international student, student studying programme which made extensive use of technology, student on a professional programme) and therefore these staff may have had a clearer agenda and specified student experience on which to reflect. However, the majority expressed no such preferences and so students from all programmes and backgrounds were invited to volunteer, with staff engaging with whatever aspects of experience happened to coincide with the period of shadowing. Moon contends that in order to critically reflect in ways which engender new thinking that can be applied to practice it is necessary *'to be clear about why reflection is being encouraged [...]* *The purpose will point in the direction of development and the expected outcomes will anticipate growth in capacity in some area or other'* (1999: p. 170). In a limited sense shadowers were acting as researchers, but without defined research questions and with the activity being bolted-on rather than a part of their everyday practice (Denscombe, 1998). Capacity for personal development was therefore constrained. Some senior management participants did state that they would be taking actions relating to staff development, but these were focused on providing staff development for others rather than self-development, thus suggesting that the scheme had played out as a tool of human resource management driven by managerialist discourse.

From my own perspective as an action researcher, my aims were to explore and reflect on how shadowing felt and how the operation of the scheme worked in practice. Because I had clear aims relevant to my role, I feel able to state that participation in the scheme directly supported and enlightened my own development, enabling me to reflect on potential improvements to the scheme. However had I not been responsible for the scheme, and therefore simply undertaking shadowing because it seemed an interesting idea, I am not sure that I could have claimed any personal development benefit - if that is defined as insights which could be applied to practice. Taking a more positive view,

however, it is possible to define personal development in less tangible, instrumental ways, as for example described by McCaffery - '*a different state of being or functioning*' (2004: p. 178). In this sense a number of shadowers reported a change in attitudes towards students, academic staff or their own motivation and general effectiveness at work. Several staff, echoing my own experience, commented very positively on the enthusiasm and engagement of students and lecturers and stated that their pride in the University had increased as a result. For some this seemed to be the main benefit and was the reason why they felt more staff should take part in future. Given that motivational activities are common components of formal staff development programmes, it may be argued that these outcomes from shadowing make it cost-effective and in line with the view of the New South Wales Department of Education and Training who state '*The best thing about shadowing is that it does not require extensive training or significant funds to plan and implement*' (2009: p. 6).

Furthermore, it is possible that shadowing may lead to '*growing critical consciousness*' (Reason and Bradbury, 2006: p. 344), especially if shadowers are enabled to share what they have learned in order to create a collective vision of the *ideal* student experience – echoing the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center's aim in relation to the '*ideal patient and family care experience*' (DiGoia et al, 2010: p. 546). In this way, shadowing could be reconceptualised as a method for carrying out appreciative inquiry, which is defined as '*the co-evolutionary search for the best in people, their organizations, and the relevant world around them*' (Cooperrider and Whitney, 2005: p. 9). This could provide a clearer focus on identifying what is good about students' experience and building on that, thus helping to resolve critical perspectives in which the scheme is viewed with suspicion as a form of quality 'surveillance'.

One interesting finding from my research was that most participants (academic and professional services) reported increased respect for, or pride in, the work of lecturers and students. This finding resonates with the calls made by Whitchurch (2008) and Bacon (2009) who argue for greater collectivity amongst different types of staff in higher education, with a stronger '*commonality of purpose*' (Bacon, 2009: p. 14). Approaching staff-student shadowing as a form of appreciative inquiry could assist in driving this process. All those taking part in

the scheme were either senior or middle managers, but a number stated that participation should be widened to all staff and one could envisage that this might assist with collegiality through the process of appreciative inquiry. On the other hand, including more junior staff as shadowers may have impacts on the willingness of lecturers to give consent, possibly creating greater resistance, or perhaps reducing resistance as junior staff would be perceived as having less power or ability to feed back problems to senior management.

Having assessed whether the scheme achieved staff development outcomes, I now consider shadowing as a way of bringing about more tangible changes in the organisation, for example through addressing issues brought to light, or through measures taken to enhance the quality of students' experience. Marsh points out that '*Change is accomplished first by individuals and then by institutions*' (1994: p. 35), but Barnett cautions that '*reflexivity, critique and imagination have to be accompanied by personal capacities for change and for critical but constructive action*' (1997: p. 7). Separating outcomes relating to staff development from those relating to practical actions to address quality issues is therefore problematic. This observation was also made by a number of participants when asked what they felt was the purpose of the scheme. It was also clear that participants defined 'staff development' in different ways. If staff development is conceptualised as critical reflection in order to increase capacity for change, Moon suggests that learning outcomes should first be defined and '*couched in terms of a definite change in work practice*' (1999: p. 178). However, the nature of the scheme was such that most participants went into shadowing with an open mind about what they might see and learn, so an immediate problem-solving/quality improvement focus was not uppermost for all shadowers. Instead their objective was simply to increase knowledge of students' experience. In Watson and Maddison's terms, this purpose is the driving imperative for institutional self-study '*It is highly important to know what we don't know about our performance; it's equally important to be able to accept that from time to time what we think we know is contradicted by the evidence*' (2005: p. 155). However, achieving this objective would constitute participants as knowing subjects with the capacity to become acting subjects (Jackson and Mazzei, 2012).

Where practical outcomes resulted from shadowing these were predominantly of three types. The first was to solve relatively minor problems in the manner of 'trouble-shooting', referred to by one senior manager as 'quick wins'. Secondly, most senior managers reported that they would be taking actions to deal with operational issues via teams of staff to whom they could delegate, sometimes through organised staff development. Finally, middle managers tended to identify matters which would be fed back to their teams of colleagues for more detailed consideration, most likely because their roles meant they did not have the executive power to effect changes. Tangible outcomes did therefore result from the shadowing scheme, some of them being quick and relatively easy solutions to simple problems and others being systemic approaches to deal with more complex issues requiring managerial interventions or infrastructural changes. Dilemmas arose when problems identified were ones which the individual or their team had no power to address and no formal method of feeding back to others who could effect change.

**To what extent were outcomes dependent upon relations of power and status, including those between staff and students in the context of growing marketisation of higher education?**

As noted above, the degree to which action could be taken to bring about change to address problems identified during shadowing depended on role and seniority of participants. It was also evident from interviews that, in general, academic and professional services staff focused on different aspects of student experience, so identified different types of issues. The degree to which participants felt comfortable with the ethics of shadowing and protocols of the scheme also influenced their willingness to take different forms of action. The range and number of staff who participated was limited by logistical constraints in running the scheme and by the fact that the senior management team wished to encourage the most senior managers to take part. The scheme therefore disenfranchised less senior staff in the University who had no opportunity to observe and explore student experiences which they might have believed to be more pressing, interesting or relevant to their own development. Indeed, several professional services managers expressed the view that more junior staff should not participate because they might not be trusted to make appropriate



comments to students. Status and role were therefore integral to the scheme and its outcomes, with management and its '*moral technology*' (Foucault, 1979: p. 205) defining power relations, giving opportunity to some and muting the voices of others.

Some senior participants intended to follow up issues identified during shadowing by arranging staff development for those they managed or by bringing about changes in processes. Because of their positions of authority they had power to define problems and solutions - in effect foregrounding what they considered to be truth. Mills characterises such processing of information in Foucault's terms '*For something to be considered to be a fact, it must be subjected to a thorough process of ratification by those in positions of authority*' (2003: p. 72). It could be argued that the shadowing scheme gave senior participants more power to legitimate managerial actions and that the source of this power stemmed from engagement with students. The shadowing scheme therefore had potential to reinforce a '*regime of truth*' (Mills, 2003: p. 74) focused on the discourse of students-as-consumers, which would be less open to challenge. Most participants expressed concern that data gleaned through shadowing could, in theory at least, be inappropriately portrayed as generalised student experience, thus '*any distortions or imbalances in the process by which the form of knowledge is constructed and maintained will go undetected*' (Barnett, 1997: p. 23). Thoughtful reflection by participants was therefore important in reducing the risk that actions following shadowing could be based on unjustifiable claims.

It may be the case that simply taking the decision to implement a staff-student shadowing scheme tilted the balance of power further towards students, as it allowed them to share any concerns with senior staff and demonstrate sources of dissatisfaction in their daily experience. It was interesting to note that several staff found conversation with their shadowing partners to be as useful, or more useful, than observation. An unspoken message may have been conveyed to students that they were being viewed as customers, empowering them to influence developments by providing feedback to senior staff at the level of the individual, rather than as one of many contributing to standardised satisfaction surveys. This was certainly true of the student who had internalised the

discourse of student satisfaction and stated as a motivation for volunteering '*I am a great believer that students should be treated with respect and be appreciated as customers by the University*'. However, it was not the case for all students and several said they chose to volunteer simply because they felt it would be interesting.

### **Whose needs did the scheme serve and how?**

Shadowing was intended to serve the development needs of staff by increasing their knowledge of students' experiences, thus leading to improvements in decision-making about processes, services, infrastructure or other forms of support. While there is evidence that staff did gain new insights and that a range of actions were taken or planned as a result, probably the greatest impact was on an unexpressed need – that relating to motivation and well-being. Participation in the scheme was reported to have contributed to increased mutual respect between staff and students, to a general sense of admiration for the quality of lecturing and to greater pride in the institution. The most significant gain seemed to be in higher levels of motivation among middle management and administrative participants who did not routinely have daily contact with students. However, it was also clear that senior academics valued the opportunity to form closer relationships with students and that this had helped to bridge a gap - reducing the distance from learning and teaching that their managerial roles had created. From an institutional perspective it may be argued, therefore, that shadowing increased participants' affective commitment, strengthening bonds between members of the University (Bowden, 2011), including those between staff and students and those between non-academic and academic staff. This would only be a significant outcome if much larger numbers of staff and students were able to participate in future.

Taking a more critical stance, the scheme can be characterised as a way of disciplining staff to perceive of themselves as service providers, giving precedence to students' needs and demands as consumers. Framing this in Foucaultian terms, shadowing encourages staff to identify and 'confess' to failings, so creating 'docile bodies' who will accept the paradigm of student power and use this as a rationale for making improvements. Some might also perceive the scheme to be a covert way for managerial staff to enter the

hallowed space of the lecture room, observing and 'spying', with no opportunity for lecturers to learn how the experience has been interpreted. Indeed, this was a concern noted by some senior academic participants. While protocols forbade shadowers to pronounce judgements, lecturers and shadowers both knew that views would have been formed. One could therefore argue that lecturers' needs were not considered in the scheme (other than through granting consent). However, evidence from interviews suggests that shadowers gained renewed admiration and respect for the quality of teaching, thus to some extent strengthening the professional status of lecturers. Although some senior academic managers intended to take forward proposed changes in the domain of learning and teaching by implementing staff development or suggesting changes to timetabling, they planned to do this in consultation with groups of staff rather than through giving critical feedback to individual lecturers.

The over-riding rationale for staff-student shadowing was to better understand students' experiences so that staff could reflect on changes required to meet their needs. This rationale reflected the prevailing discourse of student consumerism in a period when tuition fees had risen rapidly. As a process, the scheme had the advantage of illuminating the uniqueness and diversity of individual students' circumstances, encounters and activities. This was identified by many participants as a key benefit of shadowing and a source of data unobtainable through formal feedback mechanisms. Whether participating students gained in power as a result is questionable. Certainly they were given privileged access to senior staff, with staff and students being 'given permission' to talk freely with each other, thus giving students an opportunity to press home issues specific to their own circumstances. For those who experienced speedy resolutions to problems such as return of overdue assignments or fixing of a studio clock, there were 'quick wins'. Where there were more substantial issues relating to matters such as disability, course organisation and teaching space issues, or generally getting 'value for money', outcomes for participating students themselves may be partial at best. In the longer term, with larger numbers of participants, the scheme could result in improvements for future students, though Ng and Forbes caution that students' needs cannot easily be defined and may be latent or emerging.

*It is not wrong to view the student as the consumer or customer, but it is important to realize that universities must go all the way to understand what that means. Students are not homogeneous in their needs, and such needs are not preestablished nor are they merely short term* (2009: p. 58).

As in Exeter's shadowing scheme, Winchester participants reported warm relationships between staff and student partners, and students were enthusiastic about the opportunity to voice their opinions and share experiences with senior staff. Thus the scheme appears to fit neatly with the current discourse of student engagement and the cultural shift towards students as consumers, driving the 'market' for higher education by making their opinions known. However, it is worth noting the point made in the QAA Quality Code (2012) that student engagement mechanisms should be sustained and not 'one-off' initiatives. If the scheme was to be viewed as a means of complementing student surveys, by providing data about the experiences of individuals in order to identify necessary quality enhancements, repeated shadowing experiences, year after year and with a wide range of students, would be needed to capture the diversity of student experiences and their changing needs. However, Jordan and Dalal contend that '*... most situations of interest in workplace research are very messy, dynamic situations in which little can be held constant*' (2006: p. 374).

Overall, the evidence from interviews with shadowers suggests that there was to some extent a division between senior managers and less senior participants in terms of outcomes, or needs addressed. In general, for more senior shadowers the scheme served the purpose of highlighting problems which could be addressed in systemic ways such as staff development. For less senior staff, any issues identified would be fed back to colleagues to consider as a team. Both groups (with some exceptions) felt some degree of unease about how to deal with information relating to problems which they personally had no remit to address. In terms of personal development, participants from both groups expressed a sense of re-motivation, suggesting a renewed affective commitment to the University, its staff and students. In Foucaultian terms, however, this 'personal development' can be interpreted as a mechanism for reducing resistance to managerialism and for increasing compliance with consumerist discourse through fashioning the subjectivities of staff.

**What ethical, methodological and micro-political issues emerged in running the shadowing scheme?**

Ethical questions had arisen for most shadowers, including how to ensure that students did not feel they had privileged access to additional support or advice as a result of their newly formed relationships with staff. Some professional services staff, when observing students who were struggling to carry out tasks they had been set, were concerned over the extent to which they could or should intervene and use their skills to help, rather than simply observing.

Senior academic participants - all of whom were line managers of the lecturers whose sessions they visited - struggled with the precept that they should not make judgements about the quality of teaching. As line managers they felt that not giving some feedback at the end of a lecture could be interpreted as some kind of unspoken negative judgement. On the other hand one shadower felt that even an apparently neutral comment such as 'I enjoyed that' could be taken to have significance. Senior academic managers found systemic ways of following up matters they had identified which they felt needed to be addressed, rather than tackling them directly with lecturers. However, all these participants felt that if serious problems had been observed they would have had to override the protocols of the scheme and take managerial actions to deal with them. These dilemmas highlight friction between the notion of shadowing as surveillance/spying, managerial codes of accountability and professional values arising from the discourse of academic autonomy and freedom.

For those participants who were not in the most senior roles a different ethical dilemma was identified – what to do with information about issues they had observed which needed addressing, but which they or their colleagues had no remit to deal with. While they were able to report these matters in the online survey, they were unclear as to whether this would have any effect or if the problems would be picked up by those staff who had responsibility for dealing with them. This lack of clarity resulted from the fact that there were no formal linkages between the shadowing scheme and established forms of student feedback or quality management processes. I was tasked by the senior

management team with presenting an aggregate report, based on survey responses from all participants, to Planning and Resources Committee, but while some of the issues identified may have been followed up by senior managers there is no record that this was the case. This meant that some of the less senior participants who had gleaned information about student experience issues which they felt could/should be addressed, but which they could not act upon themselves, were left with a sense of impotence and powerlessness. The lack of follow-through regarding specific issues most likely indicated that senior staff perceived the scheme's fundamental purpose to be one of staff development and that any quality enhancement actions would therefore be the responsibility of individuals who had participated. In this sense, the scheme would seem to be more suitable for senior management participation.

In terms of methodology in running the scheme, the most time-consuming and difficult element was that of securing consent from lecturers whose sessions would be visited. Shadowing partners first needed to match each other's availability and this then determined which lectures would be involved. My role was to approach lecturers to seek their consent for shadowers to accompany students. In the eyes of one senior participant this was an over-elaborate process and they believed it should be left to shadowers to negotiate direct with lecturers. However, advice I had received from academic trade union members was that I should play the part of broker so that no lecturer would be put in the position of having to justify a refusal to a senior member of staff. Although the process was time-consuming I felt it was the ethical way to proceed and believed that the scheme itself could have been jeopardised if consent-seeking was not approached sensitively. Although two lecturers did withhold consent in the pilot, with one of these again refusing the following year, this did not result in any personal difficulties or ill-feeling as far as I am aware.

### **How appropriate is the application of this limited form of 'corporate ethnography' in the context of a higher education institution?**

I have labelled the staff-student shadowing scheme as a limited form of corporate ethnography, but this is a very loose categorisation and open to challenge. Jordan describes corporate ethnography as a mix of research

methods which might include participant observation and shadowing along with a range of other techniques, the key features being that '*it "lives" in business*' and has '*two fundamental concerns: one, to do research that provides insights into corporate structure and process; and two, to provide real-world solutions to problems that arise in business and industry*' (2013: p. 8). By characterizing staff-student shadowing as a form of corporate ethnography it may be argued that I am situating the University in the corporate business world - placing students in the position of customers and suggesting that the shadowing scheme is a way of gaining insights into their interface with the institution and its processes. However, the similarity with corporate ethnography is limited by a number of factors.

- The primary aim of the scheme was to provide insights for staff development rather than to solve problems.
- Most of the staff participants were not trained or experienced ethnographers. Jordan and Dalal caution that '*... because ethnography looks easy, people assume that there is nothing to it and that anybody can do it*' (2006: p. 367).
- The short time-span of the shadowing experience was not characteristic of ethnographic study. As Jordan and Dalal point out '*extended periods of fieldwork generate cumulative results that are impossible to achieve with time compression*' (2006: p. 362).
- Shadowers were not required to write up their 'research'. The scheme requested staff simply to complete a survey and it was only because I was conducting my own research that they were asked to reflect more deeply on what they had experienced and learned.
- The idea of the University as a 'business' and students as 'customers' is highly contestable.

Nevertheless, drawing further on the work of Jordan and Dalal, there are some reasons to claim the scheme has features of corporate ethnography and therefore to judge the appropriateness of its use at the University. Firstly, most staff entered into the shadowing experience without specific questions in mind, opening themselves to whatever insights were possible to glean. Through a mixture of observation and conversations they were able to identify areas of

interest and follow these up in discussion with their partners. This approach could be criticized for lack of structure and 'rigour', but as Jordan and Dalal state '*ethnography is a discovery science, not a validating one*' (2006: p. 364). It is interesting also to note Elliott and Jankel-Elliott's (2003) view that conducting ethnography in a commercial context raises more questions than answers, with findings open to interpretation. The loose structure of the shadowing scheme therefore suggests some similarities with forms of corporate ethnography.

Secondly, when conducting ethnographic inquiry within organizations, subjects are studied in their own naturalistic context. Those who espouse positivist approaches might argue that surveys with large datasets (such as the National Student Survey) give a more accurate quantifiable picture of student experience, or that focus groups or structured interviews could yield more reliable data. However, ethnographic techniques such as shadowing give insights into '*what people take for granted about their work, and thus do not ordinarily discuss*' (Jordan and Dalal, 2006: p. 368). It was the ability to experience the life of individuals, with their unique characteristics and circumstances, that was judged by some shadowers to be the greatest strength of the scheme and different from, but complementary to, standardized surveys and feedback systems. Furthermore, standard methods of obtaining feedback rely on retrospective evaluations and memories which may be unreliable or partial, whereas shadowing captures contemporaneous experiences. Some of the experiences noted by shadowers might have been unlikely to surface via surveys, yet were identified as key insights, such as '*having to sit in classrooms, having to stand in queues*', or '*there did seem to be a chaotic side to his existence, which seemed to be alien to the more ordered, timetabled world that we think they live in*', or '*not once did I see someone trying to plug a device in*'.

While it is the case that most shadowers were not trained in ethnographic methods, and the time-span of shadowing was brief, it is interesting to note Jordan and Dalal's contention that '*many corporations have started attempts to transfer ethnographic expertise to their own employees through internal training programs*' (2006: p. 363), for example by learning techniques of participant observation. Perhaps this is one way in which the staff-student shadowing scheme could be developed in future – by giving staff the skills to garner deeper



insights and to share their reflections on these in a more structured way with colleagues, so that learning can more easily be applied to practice.

### **What was the value of the research project?**

This research explored a staff-student shadowing scheme which ran during one academic year and involved eleven staff-student pairs. The principal research methods were semi-structured interviews with staff participants, together with questionnaire surveys of staff and students and my own participation as a shadower. The project was conducted as insider/practitioner research and was, in a sense, institutional research into a form of institutional research. By this I mean that my study of the value of the scheme investigated whether shadowing was an effective way for staff to gain insights into student experience, and if so whether this learning led to personal development or enhancements in quality. The study also explored ethical issues which emerged for participants and analysed findings through a Foucaultian lens, with a focus on the effects of power relations on perceptions of the scheme, its operation and outcomes.

As a form of institutional research one of the strengths of the study was that it encouraged participants, through probing interviews, to reflect more deeply on what they had learned from the experience than they would have done otherwise, which may have enhanced the likelihood of the learning being reinforced, with greater potential for follow-up actions to be taken. The chance for staff to form a relationship with a student, albeit fairly briefly, allowed them to 'get inside' the student experience, bringing to life the data harvested from standard more technical, aggregate forms of audit and quality monitoring. Their own 'study' of student experience was intensified by narrating events and insights to me, bringing forth further reflection.

Denscombe (1998) cautions that one cannot generalize findings from a study in one work-site, just as participants in shadowing expressed concern that insights gained from shadowing individual students cannot be generalized across the University. However, a key finding from this study was that a strength of the scheme lay in its exploration of uniqueness, giving a different view of student life which was distinct from, but complementary to, standardized surveys and formal

feedback mechanisms. While my own research methods were ethnographic in form, it could be argued that for participants the shadowing process was a type of mini-ethnography. In both cases there was no data collection instrument sitting between us and our subjects (Merriam, 1995).

Despite the fact that only eleven shadowing pairs were involved in the research, and that shadowers had no specific structured 'research' questions to explore, it is possible to draw tentative conclusions based on recurring themes and patterns in their responses. In addition I was able to compare interview findings with my own shadowing experience, to tease out shared insights. Barton and Lazarsfeld argue for the value of qualitative research which focuses only on a small number of instances, stating that it can '*... play the important role of suggesting possible relationships, causes, effects, and even dynamic processes*' (1969: p. 211). They further contend that '*only research which provides a wealth of miscellaneous, unplanned impressions and observations can play this role*' (1969: p. 211).

An original contribution made by this research lies in its exploration of power positions in relation to perceptions of the scheme and outcomes from it, both for individuals and for the University as a whole. The importance of power relationships in maintenance of professional autonomy and resistance to 'surveillance' cannot be underestimated, nor can the shifting dynamics of power between students and the institution resulting from the discursive forces of marketisation and student satisfaction. However, it was evident from the research that Winchester's participants in shadowing were sensitive to the delicate balance between neutral observation in order to learn (staff development), monitoring in order to judge (quality management) and forming relationships with students in order to prioritise their needs (student engagement). At another point in time or in another place this may not be so, thus reinforcing the importance of not claiming universal insights from unique settings, particularly in relation to Foucault's ideas.

The study also opens up further questions for consideration in the future development of staff-student shadowing, whether at this University or elsewhere in the sector. In this respect, the value of any insider research will be realised only if others who have power and resources are willing to reflect on the

findings and act upon suggestions and questions posed (Costley et al, 2010). Furthermore, as Allen points out in her analysis of the introduction of peer observation of teaching, success in establishing new schemes or systems is partly dependent on *'the overall climate of staff and industrial relations and the perception of institutional motivation in seeking the introduction'* (2002: p. 22).

For those who might consider implementing a similar shadowing scheme in future, the research suggests questions which need to be considered at the planning stage. These include:

- Is the main purpose of shadowing to monitor the quality of student experience, or is it to develop staff insights and assist their personal development and motivation? In the language of Foucault, what is the discourse driving the scheme?
- Which staff should participate in terms of their seniority and role?
- Should staff formulate specific questions relevant to their role and power to act, to guide their shadowing observations?
- How will information gathered through observation or conversation with students be fed back to other staff who need to know, especially where those staff work in different areas of the institution?
- Is there a recommended way for shadowers, especially senior academic staff, to respond to lecturers after sessions they have visited in order to avoid inferences about judgements?
- Should participants receive basic training in ethnographic techniques?
- What guidelines should be created for staff and students to ensure that privileged access to staff does not raise student expectations of advantage and increased individual power?
- Should shadowing be introduced as a process of appreciative inquiry in order to build a picture of the 'ideal' student experience through staff engagement with students?

The study also contributes to the sparse literature on staff-student shadowing in higher education and suggests possible lines of research for the future. In particular it would be valuable to elicit the views of lecturers whose sessions are visited by shadowers, to find out whether they feel the presence of a shadower had impacted on teaching or learning. Furthermore, in relating Foucault's ideas

to the operation of the scheme, interviews with those lecturers who refused to consent to shadowers being present in lectures could yield useful insights. Was it because they were afraid of exposure, resistant to the discourse of student consumerism or opposed to the notion of having a 'spy' in the lecture room? I was unable to conduct any research of this type because of the way in which I had designed the protocols – explicitly stating that no further action would follow from a refusal.

Interviews could be conducted with student participants to explore in more depth their views on the value of shadowing and whether they perceived themselves as 'customers'. It would also be illuminating to interview staff participants some months after shadowing to identify their longer-lasting impressions and whether they applied to their practice any lessons learned from the scheme. Finally, an action research project, re-conceptualising and re-introducing staff-student shadowing as a form of appreciative inquiry, would provide an interesting comparison with this study in terms of perceived value of the scheme and its outcomes.

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## APPENDIX I

### Pilot Staff-Student Shadowing Scheme at The University of Winchester 2010-11

#### Introduction

This pilot is based on a successful staff-student shadowing scheme launched at London South Bank University (LSBU) in 2010 which gave 38 senior managers an insight into the student experience. The purpose of the LSBU scheme was to

*‘..gain insights into the everyday issues students face, to find out what is important to them and what actions can be taken to improve their experience while studying at the University’*

<http://www.lsbu.ac.uk/news-php/news.php?newsid=578>

(accessed 24.3.11).

Among reported benefits were that students valued the chance to express their views about the University and staff gained a clearer focus on improvements needed to facilities and administration. The LSBU scheme gained national publicity when nominated for the Outstanding Contribution to Leadership Development category in The Times Higher Education Awards. This publicity caught the attention of Senior Management at the University of Winchester and the decision was made to trial the scheme during 2010-11.

It is interesting that although benefits reported by LSBU centred on understanding and improving student experience, the scheme was put forward by LSBU for the Times Higher Award in the category of *leadership development*. Thus it was decided by the Vice Chancellor that it was appropriate for me, in my role as Director of Staff Development, to develop the scheme at Winchester. However, as I also have responsibility for widening participation strategy, and serve on the University’s Learning and Teaching Committee, I have a strong interest in the student experience. Marrying the interests of staff development with the potential offered by the scheme for enhancing student experience was therefore an attractive proposition. It also seemed that establishment of a new project involving staff across the University would be fruitful ground for research examining issues in developing new processes.

#### Rationale for introduction of the Shadowing Scheme

##### ***Growing importance of the ‘student as consumer’***

From the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century there has been an accelerating shift towards a market culture in higher education (and education more generally) as evidenced by a string of headlines:

*‘Culture of consumerism rather than participation’* Times Higher Education Supplement, 26 January 1996.

*'Growing student consumerism is inevitable, says NUS'* Times Higher Education Supplement, 15 June 2007.

Writers such as Clegg and David (2006) outline the growth of neo-liberalism, marketisation and managerialism in higher education, which accompanied trends in mass participation from the 1980s and produced students who seemed more driven by employment goals than by the personal transformative possibilities of university experience. As Molesworth et al put it

*HE has adopted with increasing vigour, an orientation that has reduced a degree to an outlay that appears to secure future material affluence rather than as an investment in the self* (Molesworth et al, 2009: p.280).

The response of universities has been to focus increasingly on the quality of experience offered to students as they progress from application through undergraduate study to graduation and into employment. This focus has become ever more critical since the introduction of tuition fees, with increased marketisation of student recruitment and a proliferation of competitive league tables which include measures of student satisfaction and feedback. Although there are multiple voices of dissent to this consumerist culture, for example Ramsden (2007), it is nevertheless reluctantly recognised that the concept of value-for-money has become the currency of many students (and their parents) in making judgements about the worth of university experience, or as Watson (2011: p.17) puts it, higher education is experiencing 'a *value-for-money backlash*'.

Heightened awareness of variation in student satisfaction and attrition rates brought about via publication of results of the National Student Survey, and league tables drawn up by a range of newspapers, has caused universities to re-double efforts to understand their students' perspectives. The attraction of a research method such as shadowing - which enables staff to see the daily experience of students through their own eyes – can be understood in this context, particularly where those staff have roles which are remote from the lecture room but which play a key part in shaping the environment in which learning and teaching occurs.

### ***The need for staff development***

The University of Winchester defines staff development as

*...the process by which the University enhances the knowledge, skills and capabilities of all its staff so that an excellent quality of service is provided to staff, students and all others who engage with the university, including the wider community* (Staff Development Policy 18.2.08).

This definition contains an integral notion of 'service' to students which is perhaps more aligned to the philosophy of 'student as consumer' than some other definitions contained in the literature, for example Parker (2003: p.36), who posits that staff development is '*normally considered to include the institutional policies and programmes that support staff, both personally and professionally, in achieving their own and their institutional needs...*'.

Nevertheless, the modern HE environment demands that institutions put student experience at the heart of organisational development, not only to satisfy league tables and market forces, but also to harness professional knowledge and skills of staff to the goal of developing graduates who fulfil their potential as individuals and global citizens. In a teaching-led university, privileging the student experience is of equal importance to all staff, whether academic or in professional, support or managerial roles. It must be recognised, however, that some staff, particularly those in professional services and management, experience their roles as more distant from the student experience, perhaps having little daily contact with them despite the importance of their activities in shaping the learning environment. Some of these staff may hold relatively outdated conceptions of student life, having been students themselves in the distant past, or perhaps not having studied in higher education at all.

Student shadowing has potential to break the bounds of traditional staff development, which tends to centre on role-specific needs or generic leadership and management skills. Instead the scheme could offer an opportunity to gain insight into the socio-cultural world of students, and through observation to understand the context in which they study and the responses they make to the learning and teaching environment. It could also be a vehicle for ensuring that the 'student experience' is not viewed solely through the lens of the lecture room but through more holistic perspectives: *'Pedagogy ... has to be seen in a context wider than the classroom – in relation to curriculum, the identity of learners and socio-economic and cultural contexts ...'* Edwards and Usher (2000: p.7).

On a spectrum of staff development methods, student shadowing is at the more experiential end. Participants' reflections could lead to generation of new knowledge and improved actions to enhance the quality of student experience. When Ertl and Wright (2008) reviewed the literature on student learning experience in HE, they found lack of agreement on underlying definitions and lack of clarity on how such experience could be measured or evaluated. This led them to conclude that greater value could come from experimental methodology than from standard feedback inventories.

Although referring to research rather than staff development, it would seem that a student shadowing scheme could serve the needs of both and fit with Ertl and Wright's view that

*Future research needs to make use of methodological frameworks that capture the mediated and contextualised nature of learning, as well as social and organisational aspects of learning. Also needed are studies that look at student experience in a holistic manner, linking academic learning with other aspects of student life* (Ertl and Wright, 2008: p.207).

## **Methodological issues**

Shadowing can be defined as an ethnographic technique in which a researcher attempts to learn about a context from another's perspective. Gobo defines shadowing as

*... following (like a shadow) a particular person in his or her natural environment while observing (without intervening in) his or her actions and interactions, how he or she does business, and so on (Gobo, 2008: p.4).*

Shadowing has been used in particular to help novices learn how experienced workers undertake their daily activity. However, there has been growth in the use of shadowing to understand consumer behaviour – situated within a context of what is sometimes termed commercial ethnography (Gobo, 2008: p.3). This movement reflects current debates within the field of anthropology, where some view the appropriation of anthropological and ethnographical approaches to serve corporate interests as a threat to the purity of the discipline. Criticism is particularly levelled at more simplistic techniques such as mystery shopping. Others see the growing use of ethnography in organisations as *‘a longstanding promise of anthropology as a discipline that provides uniquely intimate access to relevant others’* (Suchman, 2000: p.1). As Pink (2006) and Roberts (2006) point out, anthropological and ethnographic methods have gained currency across a range of sectors including commercial, public services and government departments. Advantages of such approaches are summarised succinctly by Hart

*... the researcher ‘steps into the shoes’ of the research ‘subjects’ and understands ‘problems’ from their multiple perspectives, de-constructing them, and this in turn opens up possible solutions that organisations would otherwise struggle to comprehend (Hart, 2006: p.147).*

Ethnography has many other attractions to researchers who seek multiple perspectives and more holistic insights. For example, Gellner and Hirsch (2001) point to the propensity of ethnography to produce unexpected conclusions as the relevance of anything which is observed could be taken into account. The lack of, or loose, structure of related techniques allows more socially relative complexity to emerge and be examined (Chapman, 2001), and observing what people do, rather than what they say they do, throws light on what subjects may take for granted (MacDonald, 2001).

Despite these positive attributes, ethnographical methods do pose inherent difficulties. A particular problem is that if the researcher is studying a familiar setting, any assumptions must be put aside and prior knowledge of research participants and contexts must be suspended as far as possible. As Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) state, there is a danger of identifying with participants’ perspectives or failing to view them objectively as researchers must be *‘intellectually poised between ‘familiarity’ and ‘strangeness’* (1983: p.100). However, Suchman (2000) points out that this bestrangement can actually transform everyday activities into something much more interesting and ‘mysterious’, but Hannabuss (2000: p.101) cautions that *‘... this very richness is likely to include all kinds of extraneous elements or indeterminate and uncontrollable variables which, strictly speaking, serve to undermine the research findings’*

On the other hand, Van Maanen (2001: p.252) recognizes that one cannot reduce one’s research role to a *‘technocratic pursuit, devoid of recognizably human obligations and attachments’*.

It is clear that there is a spectrum of ethnographic techniques between complete participation and simple observation (Junker, 1960). In addition, timescale and breadth of focus can also vary considerably. A particular example is 'focused' ethnography (Knoblauch, 2005), characterised by intense short-term periods of data collection where the researcher must have prior familiarity with the context and where there is a specific focus of study, albeit situated within everyday social interaction. It could be argued that shadowing by an organisational insider falls within this definition, especially where customer or client experience is a particular focus.

Gobo (2008) highlights the particular benefits of shadowing as giving the opportunity to observe someone's everyday activity, to ask questions of them while they are carrying it out, and to check prior assumptions about their field of activity. McDonald (2005: p.457) postulates that this enables the shadower to gain rich data including *'the trivial or mundane and the difficult to articulate'*, and points out that it is a form of experiential learning which will *'strengthen their understanding of their own community and its skills, priorities and activities'* (2005: p.461).

Nevertheless, shadowing has the same inherent problems as other forms of observation including the effect of the shadow on the situation they are observing. An obvious criticism of any research method in which 'subjects' know they are being researched is that this fact alone can change behaviour and expressed beliefs in a manner which produces results that are artificial (Wilson 1996: p.95).

Other inherent problems include the demanding nature of continuous data-gathering, and possible over-identification with those being shadowed, who may not be representative of the population being studied. McDonald (2005), however, argues that because one is shadowing within an organizational context, this is an effective method of gaining insight into networks of activities, relationships and social environments which is not matched by more traditional, structured approaches.

There are many examples of shadowing techniques being used to research client experience in health settings (DiGioia, 2010, Royal Dental Hospital, Melbourne, 2008, University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, 2008, Vukic and Keddy, 2002), museums (MacDonald, 2001), schools (Hirsh, 1999, New South Wales Department of Education and Training, 2009) and corporations (Snyder and Glueck, 1980). The technique does not appear to have been used widely in higher education, though McDowell and Montgomery (2008) included shadowing as part of a study to analyse social networks in a group of international students at Northumbria University.

There are, of course, many other possible methods of obtaining students' perspectives on their experience at university which lie at the positivist end of the research spectrum. The National Student Survey, which has been running in the UK since 2005, is a questionnaire-based survey of the views of mainly final year undergraduates and includes questions on teaching, assessment and feedback, academic support, organisation and management, learning resources, personal development and overall satisfaction. Universities also routinely survey students at the end of teaching modules to gauge their satisfaction. These methods are invaluable in spotting trends relating to particular

programmes, or in highlighting particular problem areas. However, structured feedback with pre-determined questions is limited in that many taken-for-granted assumptions are made about what feedback is thought to be significant, and what aspects of the physical and social environment are judged to be important. These techniques also call for judgements in retrospect whereas shadowing is 'real-time' insight into student experience. On the other hand, it is clear that questionnaire surveys of a large number of students give more objective and valid results than shadowing, which involves only a small group of student and staff participants.

In the context of this study, therefore, shadowing may be seen as an adjunct and more phenomenological complement to other methods of measuring students' experiences, and can be argued to sit within an interpretive/constructivist paradigm in which an attempt is made to understand the *'complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it'* (Schwandt: p.1994). However, as mentioned in the introduction, the scheme has the additional aim of staff development. It is possible to identify several strands to this. One is the chance for staff whose roles are more remote from the daily experience of students to gain insight into their world and hence to identify strengths and weaknesses in the way services, facilities and pedagogy are organised, managed and delivered. This relative remoteness may emanate from seniority or the degree to which the role is removed from the 'front-line'.

Another benefit for staff participants is the opportunity to engage in a form of collaborative participatory research, particularly for those staff who are not in academic roles. The shadowing scheme would seem to fit loosely with Reason and Bradbury's definition of *'second person action research/practice'*. This they explain as *'our ability to inquire face-to-face with others into issues of mutual concern – for example in the service of improving our personal and professional practice both individually and separately'* (Reason and Bradbury, 2006: p.xxv)

Staff participants in the pilot shadowing scheme are encouraged to reflect on ways in which student experience could be enhanced. These enhancements could be related to improvements in areas for which they have responsibility, or by feeding back suggestions for improvements to other staff as appropriate. However, as staff and student participants are self-selecting, it would be dangerous to rely solely on this small set of observations and make assumptions that these can be generalised across student experience as a whole. Validity and reliability could be increased by repeating the scheme across a time series and by including a greater number of participants. However, the findings must always be set in the context of other forms of student feedback as outlined above.

Although shadowing is a form of research, the *'experiential knowing'* (Heron and Reason, 2006: p.149) gained by participants is intended to lead to practical outcomes. Reason and Bradbury (2006: p.2) argue that *'all participative research must be action research'*, and a key feature of action research is that action, reflection, theory and practice are brought together to inform decision-making. However, it would be a step too far to argue that this study is participatory action research per se, since the co-researchers (or shadowers) are not involved in the research design and for participants themselves there is no continuing cycle of reflection and action. It may be argued, however, that the process of setting up the shadowing scheme, reflecting on processes and

outcomes, and refining it for future cycles is a form of individual action research for me as designer and implementer of the project, with the added benefit of involving individual members of staff in co-operative inquiry.

This enquiry is, therefore, in one sense a question of the researcher researching, or shadowing the shadows. In another sense it is a study of how shadowing may be used as a means of encouraging others to research their own prior assumptions about the experience of students.

### **Ethical issues**

Conducting research within one's own institution carries with it a range of ethical issues which must be resolved before research begins, or as soon as potential conflicts arise (Hitchcock and Hughes:1995). It was therefore necessary for me to explain clearly the nature and proposed methods of research to staff, students and senior management. The most important consideration was to conduct research in such a manner that no harm would occur to students, staff or the reputation of the institution itself, and to follow the principles outlined by Diener and Crandall (1978) in ensuring informed consent by participants and avoiding invasion of privacy or deception.

I also needed to be aware of potential conflicts which could arise when researching within the competitive and political arena of higher education. As Hitchcock and Hughes (1995: p.40) put it '*As the world of education becomes increasingly politically contested, the potential for conflict between professional integrity and the demand of policy become more acute.*' In other words, I needed to guard against the possibility that my findings could be distorted, either through my own desire to enhance the reputation of the University and my place within it, or through post-publication re-analysis and selective dissemination by others for the same purpose.

Hitchcock and Hughes (1995: p.53) point to the dilemma for insider-researchers arising from '*the tendency of organizations studied to expect some 'pay back' in the form of value-free and quantifiable 'facts' or 'remedies' often to support their existing or future policies*'. As well as guarding against this potential threat to objectivity, I also needed to anticipate the dilemma raised by Campbell and Groundwater-Smith (2007: p.38) should any negative findings be revealed which '*may reflect negatively on the participants ... or on the students who are being represented*'. There was also the possibility of personal conflicts of interest resulting from my dual role as insider researcher with concomitant value-laden prior assumptions and anticipated findings - potentially resulting in '*covert manipulation*' (Workman, 2007: p.152).

All methods used in the study carried potential for ethical problems to arise, and these needed to be addressed in the research design. Access to data concerning students' programmes of study and timetables was negotiated through Faculty Managers. I had to ensure that data was used only for agreed purposes, but because I was an 'in-house' researcher agreement was easier to reach than it might have been for an 'external' researcher. It could be argued I was therefore playing on the fact that I was someone with an unequal share of power, information and resources (Cohen et. al., 2000:142).

### ***Student Participation***

Prior to my being asked to set up the scheme, the Vice Chancellor had consulted with the Student Union President about the possibility of shadowing being introduced, and had received a positive response. This was important as it would be necessary to seek volunteers, and there would be no obligation for students to participate.

I followed up this initial discussion with a meeting with the SU President to seek his views on the best way of recruiting volunteers. I had already gained agreement from the Senior Management Team that I could provide £20 incentive vouchers to each participant. I consulted the President about this and he agreed it was appropriate and likely to attract participants. He agreed that he would publicise the scheme at a SU Executive meeting at the same time as I advertised the scheme on the student pages of the University portal. The fact that the SU were very supportive was useful in my subsequent discussion with members of the University and College Union.

### ***Staff Participation***

Lecturing Staff:

Having read about the setting up of the shadowing scheme at LSBU, I decided to follow their procedure and consult with academic staff prior to implementing the scheme. I reasoned that without prior consultation such a scheme ran the risk of being perceived as 'management observation' of lecturing, with possible subsequent hostility to requests for shadowers to be allowed to accompany students to lectures. Across all sectors of education there has been continuing concern about a creeping culture of 'surveillance' and inspection, which is seen by many as a threat to the autonomy and professionalism of teachers and lecturers. Indeed the concept of quality monitoring itself has met resistance from the academic community (Barnett, 2003)

As a member of the academic trade union myself, I asked for an item to be included on the agenda for a union meeting in October 2010. At this meeting I outlined the purpose and procedures involved in the scheme.

I was slightly surprised by the willingness expressed by some members, who said they would welcome the chance to have senior managers present in their lectures, although one member expressed cynicism that such a scheme would be worthwhile. After a few minutes discussion the proposal was agreed, with minutes of the meeting stating *'it was agreed that this could only be supported if any academic colleague who would be involved was asked permission prior to the event'* (UCU branch minutes 6.10.10).

The need to seek permission was something I had anticipated from the outset, so I judged that this caveat would not be a major hindrance. However, I took the decision to establish a protocol whereby I would be the person seeking such permission. While this could potentially add to my own workload, I felt this would enable me to ensure that permissions were properly sought and that the scheme would not be compromised by misunderstandings or failure to follow the agreement I had made with the union.



In practice two lecturers did refuse permission for shadowers to attend their lectures. In one case the member of staff was very new to teaching in higher education and did not feel ready to accept a member of the Senior Management Team into a session. However, she did state that she would be very happy to do so in future, once she felt more confident in her role. In the other case, the member of staff simply stated '*I would have to decline the offer*'. I sought no reason, as I did not want to appear to be 'pushing' the scheme at reluctant participants.

#### Staff Shadowers:

Initially I was asked to invite only Deans, Directors and members of the Senior Management Team to become shadowers. I did this via an agenda item at Planning and Resources Committee, followed by an email outlining the aims of the scheme and the protocols to be followed. Further details follow in section 4.1. Once I had received positive responses I then matched them to students, either by choosing students studying programmes in which staff had expressed an interest, or by working my way down the list of students according to which of them had responded first.

There were some ethical issues to take into account in the matching process. In particular I needed to ensure that the matched student was not already known to the member of staff concerned, as this could have placed either the student or the staff member in an awkward situation. I therefore checked the name of the student and their programme of study with the staff member before contacting the student. In practice no such issues arose.

I also ensured that students were clear they could withdraw at any time, or could refuse a particular shadower. As I acted as intermediary, this minimised embarrassment on either side. It was of utmost importance that the students did not have their studies disrupted. I therefore made sure that students received a copy of the protocols I had sent to staff, and devised and issued a set of student protocols. Three students did withdraw during the matching process. One simply did not respond to emails after she had been matched. Another contacted the member of staff to say she wished to withdraw, but no reason was given. The third emailed me to say '*I've found myself very busy with Uni work etc. Could I please withdraw as unfortunately I do not have time?*'

#### ***Protecting the Privacy of Staff and Student Participants***

A number of issues needed attention to ensure that participants' privacy was not compromised in any way. Staff and student participants were requested to complete an online survey after the shadowing ended. This would be the basis for my report on the scheme for Planning and Resources Committee and would also be a key part of my research study. The questionnaire requested staff and students to give their names, as this would be essential for analysis and for identifying whether the scheme worked better for staff in particular roles, or for students following different types of programmes or in different years of study. I also asked staff to state what previous experience they had of study in higher education as I judged this could be relevant to the degree to which they benefited from shadowing. However, I made it clear in the survey introduction that responses would be completely anonymised in my report.

Finally, I needed to make it clear to staff and students that this was not just a management initiative, but would also be the basis for a research project which may lead to publication in future. I therefore gave all participants an information sheet outlining arrangements for privacy and use of data and asked all participants to sign an ethics consent form.

## **Methods**

### ***Setting up the Scheme***

My first priority was to clearly define the aims of the shadowing scheme, based on that launched at LSBU but in the context of the University of Winchester. These I identified as:

- to enhance staff understanding of the daily experience of University of Winchester students
- to suggest ways in which students' experience can be enhanced, for example through improvements to services, systems or facilities
- to open a different communication channel with students
- to open up possibilities of longer-term mentoring relationships where appropriate

These aims were set out in a briefing document for Planning and Resources Committee (PRC), from whom I would need approval, together with an outline of how the scheme would operate. I attended the PRC meeting at which the item was discussed. No concerns or questions were raised, perhaps not surprisingly as it was endorsed by the Vice Chancellor.

After the meeting I invited students (via Portal messaging) to volunteer to be shadowed for two half days, with an incentive of £20 in high street vouchers (IV). The Student Union President had advised that a portal message would be an effective method of recruiting volunteers. Students were asked only to provide their name, contact details, year and programme of study. I made no attempt to target students from particular programmes, as I judged that self-selection was more important in gaining commitment from students. However, I requested students from their first or second year of study as, from my experience, I felt that final year students would be under more pressure of work.

The first day my message appeared on the Portal I received fourteen email applications – five of whom were third years (!) and one an American exchange student. On the second day I received further two applications early in the morning (including from one third year), so decided to remove the advert to avoid being overloaded with students for whom there would be no staff matches. As there seemed to be enthusiasm from third years, I decided to accept their applications. I was very pleasantly surprised by the level of interest and speediness with which students responded.

My next step was to invite members of PRC – comprising Directors and Deans – by email to participate as shadowers. I received seven positive responses on the same day, and one more a week later. Responses included one particularly enthusiastic reply:

*'What a fantastic idea and please put me down for this along with all of my Senior Management staff in my Department'*

This response led me to send emails to the three additional members of staff concerned, two of whom responded very quickly to say they wished to be included. The third initially expressed interest, but then did not follow through.

Another response from a member of PRC included a specific request to shadow a Primary Education student. As I had no such students who had applied, I therefore put another message on the Portal seeking Education recruits only. As a result I received a further six applications before removing the advertisement. Student applicants are shown in Figure 1:

**Figure 1: Student Applicants**

Gender	Year	Subjects
F	1	Choreography & Dance
F	1	CYCS & Religious Studies and Theology
F	2	Drama and Stage Management
F	1	Accounting and Finance
F	3	Creative Writing and Education Studies
F	3	Education Studies
F	Exchange	English & American Literature
F	2	Archaeology
F	2	Business Management
M	3	Politics & Global Studies
F	3	Psychology
F	2	English Lit and Lang
F	1	Stage Management and Drama
F	3	History and Education Studies
F	1	Psychology
M	1	Vocal & Choral Studies and Ethics & Spirituality
F	1	BA Primary - History
M	3	BA Primary - English, Science, Drama
F	4	BA Primary - English
F	1	BA Primary - Maths, Science, English
F	1	BA Primary
F	4	BA Primary

I decided to participate in the scheme myself, so by early November I now had eleven participating staff. Given that I had a total of twenty-two students, I invited another four Professional Services middle managers to join. By the end of November all four had signed up. One subsequently withdrew due to pressure of work but I quickly found a replacement from within her Department

– also at middle management level. This still meant that I had five unmatched students, but I felt this would give flexibility should any matched students withdraw.

Once staff had agreed to participate I emailed them with a list of students, their programme of study and year, and invited them to select five students they would like to shadow, arranged in preferred order. As each responded, I matched them on a spreadsheet to their most preferred student who had not already been selected by someone else.

After matching staff and students I obtained a copy of the student's timetable from their Faculty Manager. The shadow was sent a copy of staff protocols and student contact details. I let the students know they had been successfully matched and who their shadower would be, attaching a copy of the student protocols. The member of staff was asked to liaise with the student to find two mutually convenient half-days for shadowing, one of which must include a lecture or seminar. However, I made it very clear that once dates had been provisionally agreed they must be sent to me so I could seek permission from academic staff for the shadow to attend with the student.

In some cases it seemed relatively straightforward for staff and students to agree dates, but others took a great deal longer. In a few cases students proved difficult to contact by email. There were particular problems when the pair had agreed to delay shadowing until Semester 2, as in some cases student timetables for the Semester were agreed very late, or members of teaching staff were not known. Additional complications arose where the lecturer on the timetable was being replaced by a different lecturer, where off-site activities were taking place, or where lectures were cancelled due to a variety of reasons. In these cases it meant either that I had to contact replacement staff/speakers for permission, or that dates had to be re-negotiated.

In only two cases did lecturers refuse permission to have a shadow in their session. In one case no reason was given, and in the other the lecturer (whose session would have been visited by a member of the Senior Management Team) was new to teaching and did not feel comfortable with the proposal at such an early stage in her career.

Three students withdrew after being matched to a member of staff. Two of these made contact to state they were withdrawing, with one citing pressure of work. The third simply stopped responding to contact. In one case I was able to find a replacement, but the member of staff concerned was unable to re-engage with a new student due to pressure of work. One member of staff withdrew from shadowing due to increased workload resulting from a change in role.

In some cases shadowing for two half-days was not possible, usually due to difficulties in finding a second convenient date, so the scheme ended for them after only one half-day. A summary of set-up arrangements and shadowing carried out is set out in Figure 2.

**Figure 2: Shadowing Arrangements**

<b>Staff Role</b>	<b>Student</b>	<b>Study Year</b>	<b>Programme</b>	<b>Detailed Arrangements</b>
Director of Professional Service	F	2	Drama and Stage Management	Shadow emailed student, but student withdrew by email to me citing pressure of University work. Alternative student identified (as below)
	F	2	English Literature and Language	Shadowing arranged, but student was sick on day, therefore informal meeting in social space took place later instead. Shadow wishes to participate in scheme in future.
Professional Service Middle Manager	F	3	Creative Writing and Education Studies	No problems with set-up. Shadowing of seminar, tutorial, study using IT and socialising
Senior Management Team	M	3	Primary Education	Shadowing scheduled for Semester 2, so delays due to lack of timetable. Initial date agreed with one lecturer, but shadow then had to cancel due to lack of availability. Two further dates agreed with lecturers, the first of which took place, but the second was cancelled due to school experience. Not possible for student to identify a second date, therefore shadowing ended at this point
Professional Service Middle Manager	F	3	Psychology	Email contact established between student and staff. However, shadow had to withdraw due to pressure of taking on additional work role. Another member of staff from same Department took over as shadow (see 7 below)
Senior Management Team	F	1	Accounting and Finance	One lecturer declined permission. Shadowing took place in two different lectures, one with visiting lecturer, one with study skills staff.

				Student then shadowed member of staff for A day.
Dean of Faculty	F	1	Primary Education	Some delay in set-up. Shadowing took place and included a lecture, seminar, groupwork and studying in the library
Professional Service Middle Manager	F	3	Psychology	No problems with set-up. Shadowing of lecture, study using library and IT, socialising
Professional Service Middle Manager	F	3	Education Studies	No problems with set-up. Shadowing of lecture, study using library, socialising
Director of Professional Service	F	1	Childhood, Youth and Community Studies & Religious Studies & Theology	Shadowing arranged for one lecture in Semester 1, but lecture cancelled as University closed due to snow. Student then withdrew at beginning of Semester 2
Director of Professional Service	F	1	Stage Management and Drama	Shadowing of one lecture arranged, but then cancelled as student sick. Shadowing re-arranged and included a lecture and a practical workshop.
Director of Professional Service	F	2	Business Management	Not possible for shadow to fix a date during Semester 1. Student did not then respond to requests from shadow during Semester 2. Alternative student identified (below)
	F	3	Politics and Global Studies	Timetable forwarded. Due to shortage of remaining time in academic year, and pressure of work for shadow, no shadowing took place. Shadow wishes to participate in future.
Professional	F	3	History and	No problems with set-up. Shadowing of lecture

Service Middle Manager			Education Studies	and practical workshop
Professional Service Middle Manager	F	2	Archaeology	Shadowing of one lecture took place. Date identified for second shadowing, but industrial action was taking place so lecture cancelled. Time ran out for further shadowing
Director of Academic Service	M	3	Politics and Global Studies	One lecturer refused permission. Shadowing of lecture, careers interview, socialising
Senior Management Team	M	1	Vocal and Choral Studies & Ethics and Spirituality	Difficulty gaining email confirmation of permission from lecturers. However, some direct communication took place between shadow and lecturing staff. Shadowing completed – lecture, seminar and practical workshop attended
Professional Service Middle Manager	F	American Exchange	English & American Literature	First shadowing half-day cancelled due to University closure because of snow. Second opportunity not suitable as it was a revision session for an exam which the student would not be taking (as she would have left the country by then). However, one lecture and one seminar were finally shadowed on the same half-day, and there was also general discussion between shadow and student

### ***On-line survey***

At the end of the shadowing experience staff and students were asked to complete an online survey summarising their views about the operation of the scheme and what they had learned from participation in it. Students received their incentive vouchers upon completion of the survey, thus ensuring 100% completion rate.

Although questionnaires can be used to obtain some attitudinal data through open questions, they are not suitable for the obtaining detailed, in-depth 'rich' data which is available through methods such as interviews and observations (Brown and Dowling, 1998). Particularly where open questions are used, it is sometimes difficult to interpret respondents' meaning, for as Oppenheim notes *'Free-response questions are often easy to ask, difficult to answer, and still more difficult to analyse'* (Oppenheim, 1992: p.113). On the other hand, open questions allow respondents to use their own words rather than those chosen by the researcher (Weisberg, Krosnick and Bowen, 1996: p.78).

On-line surveys are, however, relatively low cost, efficient means of obtaining information, thus reducing researcher time and effort (Wright, 2005, Denscombe, 1998). A questionnaire which is well designed is easy to complete and easy to analyse (Denscombe, 1998). It is possible to obtain both quantitative and qualitative data, depending on the researcher's purposes and the way questions are constructed (Cresswell, 2003). Questionnaires provide 'broad-brush' pictures within which to situate detail obtained by other means, which may help to identify bias and increase reliability. Furthermore, the broad-brush approach may help to clarify issues for further exploration and identify interesting categories of respondent for follow-up investigation (Denscombe, 1998).

### ***Staff Survey***

As soon as each participant completed their shadowing, I sent them a link to an online survey. The purposes of the survey were to gather information about the range of experiences included in the shadowing, the insights staff had gained into students' lives, and actions and enhancements staff judged to be needed. The survey was also designed to elicit views on the operation of the scheme itself and how it might be improved in future.

Question 1, 12 and 14 were the only ones with pre-coded answers, the rest being open free-text questions. Question 1 asked staff to identify what types of activity they shadowed so that I could get an overall picture both from individuals and at the aggregate level. I also felt that, as an opening question, this would set the scene for reflection on the whole experience, not just a particular lecture or seminar. Questions 12 (an optional question) sought to identify what prior experience staff had of studying in higher education, and in particular whether they had been students at Winchester. I felt this could be significant in terms of staff expectations and interpretations of their shadowing experience.

Questions 2, 3 and 6 asked staff to identify what they had learned about the way in which students study, how engaged they seemed to be, and how they



socialized. These questions were designed to encourage staff to reflect on the student experience in a holistic way and to consider the extra-curricular as well as academic context.

Questions 4, 5 and 7 sought reflections on any problems students appeared to be having, and what support systems they were finding helpful. I felt these could be key questions for teasing out areas of the student experience which needed attention, and could potentially also highlight opportunities for building on less formal types of support being used by students.

In terms of outcomes from the pilot scheme, questions 8 and 9 were most significant. These asked staff to identify actions they might subsequently take to address issues identified through observing or talking with students. Responses here would clearly be filtered through the context of staff's job roles. However, question 9 made it clear they should also suggest wider aspects they felt needed attention, which were not directly related to their own role and field of operation.

Question 11 asked staff why they had volunteered for the scheme. I hoped that this would give me insight into motivation and how this might have affected responses, as well as providing a basis for attracting future participants.

Questions 13 and 14 sought views on whether the pilot should be continued and how the operation of the scheme might be improved. This would provide me with information about how successful the protocols had been, and what changes may be needed to procedures in future.

I issued the first member of staff to complete the shadowing experience with the pilot questionnaire and accompanying instructions. Apart from asking them to complete the questionnaire, I also asked them to give feedback on some of the questions raised by Bell:

*'How long did it take you to complete?  
Were the instructions clear?  
Were any of the questions unclear or ambiguous? If so, will you say which and why?  
Did you object to answering any of the questions?  
Was the layout of the questionnaire clear/attractive?  
Any comments?'* (Bell, 1993: p.85)

It was apparent from the feedback that the survey took around 20-25 minutes to complete and that the layout, instructions and covering note were clear and inoffensive. As a result I did not make any changes to the pilot questionnaire.

### ***Student Survey***

Students were requested to complete an online survey at the end of their shadowing. I sent them the web-link and asked them to let me know when they had completed the survey so that I could then issue their gift vouchers. As with the staff version, I asked the first student to be sent the survey to give me feedback on the format and questions. Once again, no changes to the survey were suggested.

The purposes of the student survey were to find out what had motivated students to volunteer and how they felt about the scheme, both in terms of its operation and the concept of shadowing itself. It was also designed to be a means of teasing out whether there was a mis-match between what students felt staff should already know about their experience, and what they perceived staff to have actually learned during the process. I hoped that students' responses would help me to shape the scheme beyond the pilot, including any changes needed to selection of student participants.

The student survey was shorter than that sent to staff, but otherwise the format of questions was similar – mostly free text open-ended questions, but with an additional pre-coded question (6) asking students how comfortable they felt when being shadowed. This was designed to give me insight into whether the guidelines and protocols had worked well from the student viewpoint.

### ***Self-participation and learning***

I decided to take part in the shadowing scheme myself as a way of gaining insight into how it felt from the staff point of view, what operational difficulties arose and what kind of learning could be generated. I also felt that my experience and insights would triangulate responses given by other participants. I followed the same procedures and protocols, except that I did not complete the online survey (judging that a full descriptive account would be more useful).

### ***Validity and reliability of methods***

Problems with research methods can stem from technical procedures and also from the researcher's own beliefs in relation to theory. Grbich (1999: p.65) points to the central role of reflexivity on the part of the researcher, which is described as '*a process of self-awareness that should clarify how one's beliefs have been socially constructed and how these values are impacting on interaction and interpretation in research settings*'.

To suggest that any methods used could be value-free would be to deny that the researcher is a social being who *produces* knowledge. A clear weakness of the shadowing method is that all staff participants bring their own values and expectations to the experience. These may stem from their job role and purpose, their prior experience (or lack of it) as a student, their espoused tacit theories about the role of higher education and the behaviours expected of students. These values will not only act as filters in their interpretation of shadowing experiences, but they will also influence what information they seek out and what questions they may ask of the students they shadow.

While one could argue that an experienced researcher of the student experience will also be influenced by their own values – whatever the methods employed – those participating as shadowers in this scheme do not necessarily have a background in research and are therefore likely to be less reflexive and self-aware in their approach. On the other hand, the main purpose of the scheme is to briefly immerse staff participants in the student experience so that they can consider what actions need to be taken to enhance the study environment and so they can develop more knowledge and understanding in the context of their

professional development. In other words, the focus is on practical outcomes in the setting of the job roles of the staff concerned.

The use of open-ended questions in the online survey of staff and student participants provided qualitative data for the study. I did not use pre-set/coded categories as I did not want to lead respondents in their answers or minimize complexity of their responses. Hitchcock and Hughes suggest that open questions provide '*qualification of actions, ideas, values and meanings through the eyes of participants rather than quantification through the eyes of an outside observer* (1995: p.26).'

It was particularly important that the pilot study should be constructed in such a way as to allow me to analyse data and categorise emergent themes and issues in a way which created some meaning, for '*at the beginning of a study the researcher is uncertain about what will ultimately be meaningful*' (Merriam, 1998: p.179). However, by using open-ended questions, validity may be compromised by lack of consistency in the way questions are interpreted and in the selective nature of answers respondents choose to give.

Reliability is uncertain in a study where participants are self-selecting volunteers. Students may volunteer for a variety of reasons – perhaps because they feel particularly unhappy about their experience and wish to share their concerns, or because they are highly motivated and wish to make positive contributions to the University community. Similarly, staff may have unique reasons for participating which could skew their responses, or may feel coerced into volunteering for a scheme which has endorsement from senior management. To some extent, survey responses from staff and students might help identify bias, but it would be vital to ensure that ensuing reports were open about the subjective nature of responses and the ethnographic, rather than positivist, approach taken.

## **Issues encountered**

### ***Communication***

Communication was, without doubt, the most complex and time-consuming element of the whole scheme. Several aspects were particularly problematic. These included establishing initial contact between shadows and students, gaining permission from lecturing staff and keeping abreast of the progress of each shadowing arrangement. Most communication took place by email as the most practicable means of making contact and keeping records of events. Between October and May I had sent 338 emails and received 253.

Figure 3 shows the detailed process of setting up arrangements with three different shadowing pairs. These have been selected to show:

- Pair One - arrangements were simple and straightforward to make
- Pair Two - difficulties encountered were so great that only a meeting took place between the shadow and the student, rather than the full intended shadowing experience.
- Pair Three - considerable efforts were needed to bring the shadowing to fruition

**Figure 3: Set-up arrangements for three selected staff-student pairs**  
*(TS denotes the author)*

Pair	Date	Action
One	11.11.10	Shadow and student matched and informed by email from TS
	11.11.10	Shadow initiated contact with student
	13.11.10	Student responded to shadow with proposed dates
	15.11.10	Shadow confirmed dates would be suitable and asked for name of lecturers
	16.11.10	Student responded with lecturers' names
	16.11.10	Shadow sent dates, times and lecturers' names to TS
	16.11.10	TS contacted lecturers to seek permission for shadow to attend
	16.11.10	One lecturer emailed TS giving permission, but supplied further information about the proposed seminar as it would be slightly different from the norm. The other lecturer gave permission
	17.11.10	TS emailed lecturer to confirm the first lecturer that the information would be sent to the pair and that the student would be asked to confirm with the lecturer whether the shadowing would go ahead as proposed
	17.11.10	Shadow confirmed with TS that they were happy with proposed sessions
	18.11.10	TS confirmed with both shadow and student that both staff had given permission
	13.12.10	Shadow emailed TS to say that both shadowing sessions had taken place
	14.12.10	TS emailed shadow and student with link to on-line questionnaire
	14.12.10	Shadow and student both emailed to confirm questionnaire had been completed
	15.12.10	TS emailed student with details of how to collect incentive vouchers

<b>Pair Two</b>	9.11.10	Shadow and student matched and informed by email from TS
	10.11.10	Shadow contacted student by email
	2.12.10	Shadow emailed TS to say there had been no response from student
	2.12.10	TS emailed student. Student responded to say she wished to withdraw
	2.12.10	Second student match sent to shadow
	4.1.11	Shadow had not responded to TS to confirm satisfaction with match, so TS emailed to check
	4.1.11	Shadow confirmed that match was satisfactory, but stated that shadowing would not now be possible until mid-February
	4.1.11	TS emailed student to check she was still willing to participate. Student confirmed she was
	5.1.11	Shadow initiated contact with second student
	24.1.11	Shadow emailed TS to say there had been no reply from the second student
	25.1.11	TS emailed shadow and suggested contacting the student again in mid-February once the new semester was under way
	18.2.11	Shadow made contact with student and agreed times for shadowing
	19.2.11	TS contacted lecturer to seek permission
	21.2.11	Lecturer agreed to give permission. TS emailed shadow to confirm
	24.2.11	Shadow arrived at agreed lecture, but student failed to arrive
	28.2.11	Student emailed shadow to say she had been ill, and offered alternative dates
	28.4.11	The shadow had been unable to agree a mutually convenient time for shadowing, so shadow and student met for a discussion instead. Shadow has indicated she would like to

		try again for a full shadowing experience in next academic year
	28.4.11	Links to online survey emailed to shadow and student
<b>Pair Three</b>	8.11.10	Shadow and student matched and informed by email from TS
	9.11.10	Shadow contacted student
	w/b 15.11.10	Student agreed dates with shadow
	3.12.10	TS contacted shadow to find out agreed dates
	3.12.10	TS emailed student to find out names of lecturers
	9.12.10	Student provided names, but as the shadowing was due to take place in next semester she was unsure which lecturers would be teaching agreed sessions, and could not confirm that lectures would be as stated on provisional timetable
	1.2.11	TS emailed shadow to check which lecture dates had finally been agreed
	1.2.11	TS emailed course administrator to get timetable so that lecturing staff could be identified
	1.2.11	TS emailed lecturers to seek permission
	1.2.11	One lecturer refused to give permission
	1.2.11	Alternative lecturer (for different lecture on same date) approached by TS
	2.2.11	Second lecturer agreed to give permission
	2.2.11	Alternative lecturer telephoned TS to say a visiting lecturer would be taking the session identified
	2.2.11	TS emailed shadow to see if shadowing session involving a visiting lecturer would be acceptable. Shadow agreed
	2.2.11	TS emailed to seek permission from visiting lecturer
	2.2.11	Visiting lecturer agreed to give permission
	2.2.11	TS emailed shadow with confirmation of the 2

		shadowing dates and sessions
	4.3.11	TS emailed shadow to check that both shadowing sessions had occurred
	4.3.11	TS emailed shadow and student with links to online questionnaire
	7.3.11	TS emailed student with details of how to collect incentive vouchers

## **Findings**

### ***Student response***

Although on-line questionnaires were completed by participating students, these were not analysed in the pilot study. However, it was interesting to note that when notifying me by email that they had completed the questionnaire, several students sent unsolicited comments about the scheme which indicated their positive responses to the experience.

*‘It was a really great experience and I think this scheme is really meaningful.’*

*‘I really enjoyed the experience ...’*

*‘I found the shadowing scheme very interesting and thought that it was a very positive experience for both myself and my shadower – thank you for the experience.’*

### ***Analysis of staff questionnaires***

The analysis below is based on the first 10 staff to complete their shadowing experience and questionnaire. Shadowing experiences are listed in figure 4 and show that most staff participated in more than one type of experience. Survey questions are highlighted in yellow below, with key findings described.

**Figure 4: Shadowing Experiences**

Lecture	7
Seminar (including student giving presentation)	4
Socialising in Learning Café or Dining Hall	4
Discussions/meetings with student	3
Individual study in library	2
Individual study using IT or media facilities	2
Practical workshop	2
Careers interview	1
One to one tutorial	1

“What did you learn afresh about students’ study patterns and habits?”

The most common theme in response to this question was that of how intensively students worked. Four respondents noted this, for example

*"... it was interesting to me to see what a full programme she had, with the gaps between classes mostly filled with either planned study periods, or other activities. I found this different to my time as a student, when one barely planned ahead beyond the next lecture, and the gaps between such activities were filled with lon, periods of doing relatively little"*

On the other hand, one respondent noted

*"I was surprised by how little a student could be on campus during a day/week"*

Another theme related to learning preferences, though it is clear from the range of comments that considerable diversity was encountered in this area

*"I was surprised the student hardly made any notes during the lecture, when friends were. I asked about this and they said this wasn't their learning style"*

*"This student doesn't use the LC very often, as they find too noisy to work and there aren't enough computers"*

*"I was very surprised (and impressed) how my student was able to focus on research whilst in the learning cafe. This is clearly her study area of choice"*

*"My third year student seems to spend most of every day in private study if she is not in class. She studies in the Learning Cafe and the library"*

**"What did you learn about how enthusiastic/engaged students seemed to be with their programmes of study?"**

Again, a common theme clearly emerged. All eight staff who responded to this question observed students who were very interested or engaged in their lectures. Seven referred to the engagement of the whole group of students in sessions shadowed, while one commented that

*"Others in the class were somewhat less engaged – in particular I was surprised to see so many people texting openly and walking in and out of the class whilst people were presenting."*

**"What did you learn about study problems or issues students seemed to be having?" and "What did you learn about frustrations or issues students have with any aspects of their university experience?"**

These questions highlighted a range of issues (figure 5).



**Figure 5: Problems or issues observed or raised by students**

	Number of mentions
Quality of IT provision	3
Lectures not lasting for allocated time or cancelled	2
Poor/variable quality of teaching space	2
Too many UK-centred cultural references	2
Issues with availability of library books	2
Communication between students and Faculties	2
Lack of on-line submission of assignments	2
Quality of module handbooks	1
Poor quality teaching	1
Poor relationship between student and lecturer	1
Inconsistency in marking	1
Frustration with complaints process	1
Need for more pre-application information about course	1
Lack of careers/employability component in course	1
Need for more explanation of value of first 2 years' work	1
Poor experience of those on combined honours programme	1

It should be noted that some of the more frequently arising concerns were also those which were actually observed during the shadowing (shaded in figure 5). All the other concerns were noted as a result of discussion with students. However, 2 respondents noted that students had not raised any issues.

**“What did you learn about where students generally go for support with problems, and whether they are helped by that support?”**

Only three respondents identified this as a topic which had arisen in conversation. In two cases students had made positive reference to support they were receiving from Student Services. In the third instance the student had identified two forms of support

*“My student feels very well supported by her tutors ... She feels she can ask for help which they will give willingly. She uses the services of the international office.”*

**“What did you learn about where and how students socialize?”**

Five respondents stated that they had not learned anything new about this. Three noted that students seemed to spend most time socializing in other students' accommodation, but one identified the Learning Café as a key location. However, one respondent noted

*"This student seemed to be a loner and not very social either inside or outside the University. During conversations I don't think them having to re-do a year has helped with the social aspects of their experience here with us"*

**"What actions might you now take, as a result of the shadowing experience, in your own role/area of responsibility?"**

This key question raised two types of responses. In five cases respondents noted that they would work harder to enhance the quality of student experience or be more aware of issues raised through shadowing, but without explicitly stating a specific action. For example

*"As far as specific actions are concerned, none in particular come to mind, but on a more general level, the opportunity to actually participate, however briefly, in the student experience, did give one a much better feel for this"*

*"I will make more effort to interact with students where appropriate to gain their perspectives/insights into things I may be working on at a given point in time"*

Other respondents noted specific actions (figure 6).

**Figure 6: Specific actions taken as result of shadowing**

Raise issue of drab teaching spaces and make them more colourful
Add questions relating to experience of Combined Honours Programme in student satisfaction survey
Look afresh at IT performance
Lobby for better seats

One respondent noted that

*"There have already been some unanticipated outcomes from the lecture I attended, as a result of which I facilitated links between the department and my daughter's school as part of a pilot scheme which might contribute to employability and widening participation and community engagement"*

**"What issues do you now feel the University as a whole needs to consider/address to enhance the student experience?"**

A number of issues were raised (figure 7). In some cases comments were made by members of the Senior Management Team and therefore it was clear they would have the power to take issues forward. However, in other cases it was not clear whether further action would follow, other than the issues being raised via my summary report on the shadowing scheme which would be seen by the Senior Management Team.

**Figure 7: Issues raised by respondents for the University as a whole to consider**

	Number of mentions
Make teaching spaces more colourful	2
General improvement to teaching accommodation	2
Make enhancing facilities for students the top priority	1
Encourage Lecturers to report IT problems	1
Etiquette rules in relation to students using mobiles in class	1
Formal, robust mechanism for students to raise issues about lecturers/courses	1
More language support for international students, or higher language entry requirements	1
Check pre-entry information for specific course	1
Compare quality of module handbooks with a view to sharing good practice	1

**“Why did you volunteer for the Staff-student Shadowing Scheme?”**

Most respondents stated that they wished to gain insight into students’ perspectives and experiences. Two referred to the length of time since they had studied and the need to remind themselves of what it was like. For example

*“I have not studied here, am in a new post and have not been a university student in over 20 years so thought this would be an excellent learning experience”*

(Only one participant had not studied in higher education.)

**“How might the operation of the staff-student shadowing scheme be improved in future?”**

Figure 8 shows suggestions made, though two examples marked with asterisks indicate limited awareness of existing scheme arrangements.

**Figure 8: Suggested improvements to scheme**

Guidance to ensure experience outside the classroom is covered
Do not allow academic staff to refuse someone sitting in on class
Ask students their rationale for participating*
Spend half-day with students rather than just one or two classes*
Shadow at least two students
More staff should participate, particularly Deans
Follow up with student a week or two later

"In light of your experience, do you think the shadowing scheme should be extended to more staff?"

Nine respondents answered "yes" to this question and one answered "perhaps". One commented that all Directors of Professional Services should participate.

## **Conclusion**

### ***What did the scheme achieve?***

The enthusiastic response to my initial call for student participants, together with their unsolicited comments, suggested that students embraced the scheme and felt valued as a result of the interest being taken by senior staff in their experience. In itself this could be seen as a positive outcome and reason to sustain the project.

Nine of the ten staff surveyed stated that the scheme should be extended to more staff, with one suggesting that all Deans should be included and another proposing that all Directors should participate. Survey comments indicated that the first two aims of the scheme, namely a) to enhance staff understanding of the daily experience of University of Winchester students and b) to suggest ways in which students' experience can be enhanced, had been at least partially met through the pilot scheme. Staff who were in a position to do so had followed up issues observed, or raised by students, soon after participating. Other issues had been drawn to the attention of senior staff via my summary report to Planning and Resources Committee.

The third aim of the scheme - to open a different communication channel with students – was an integral component. As a means of gaining insight into students' perspectives the scheme complemented other methods such as student surveys and module feedback, but the difference was that shadowing involved direct observation rather than reading what students had reported, thus throwing light on what student themselves may have taken for granted (MacDonald, 2001). Furthermore, observations made by staff may have been contextualised within existing knowledge built up through receipt of repeated student surveys, thus in a sense triangulating previous findings.

However, this new communication channel also raised some controversy. When I informally presented findings at a meeting of the Learning and Teaching Committee, some colleagues expressed irritation that senior staff appeared only to react to an issue when they observed it for themselves, and had not given sufficient weight to concerns raised previously by academic staff – for example in relation to the quality of teaching spaces. It was also stated that as the scheme was, by necessity, a method which only captured a tiny sample of the student experience, it carried the risk of raising to prominence issues which may not commonly arise through more formal methods of receiving student feedback.

Reflecting on these issues, my feelings were that at least the scheme had been successful in finally bringing some long-standing issues to the attention of senior staff, thus prompting remedial action. The point relating to sampling was, of course, entirely fair. However, should the scheme be sustained over several

years it would be possible to see if trends were emerging, thus increasing reliability of findings.

On the positive side it was clear from survey responses that participants had gained new, or additional, respect for the skills and efforts of teaching staff. It is interesting to note that in the triannual staff survey carried out during spring 2011 only 46.7% of academic staff agreed or agreed strongly with the statement *“As a member of academic staff I feel my work is valued by Professional Services/Support staff”*. The exposure of mainly non-academic staff to first-hand observation of the classroom could therefore be another beneficial outcome of shadowing.

In terms of staff development, the most common outcome appeared to be greater understanding of the need to focus on better quality facilities and systems for students, and the recognition that addressing student needs must be the highest priority for all staff. In light of the growing consumer culture among students it is possible to argue that this is the strongest rationale for continuation of the scheme. The final aim of the scheme - to open up possibilities of longer-term mentoring relationships where appropriate – was not achieved, to my knowledge. However, I did not explicitly promote this element and so did not expect such development to occur.

### ***Proposed changes to scheme***

Overall, taking into account the survey findings and the response from Planning and Resources Committee, I judged the pilot scheme to be a success. I was fortunate that the Senior Management Team were also keen for the scheme to continue and I was mindful of Fullan’s condition for successful implementation of educational change *‘... both pressure and support are necessary for success’* (Fullan, 1992: 127).

A number of lessons were clear from the pilot. Firstly, the lengthy process of establishing communication between shadows and students indicated that an earlier start in the academic year would be helpful. Secondly, the scheme guidance needed improvement so it was clear that shadows should spend time talking with students and either observe what they do outside lectures, or ask them about this.

In terms of participants, I needed to follow the direction of the Senior Management Team who indicated that all Deans and Directors should be encouraged to take part. However, I judged that some of the participating middle managers appeared to have gained most from the scheme and therefore needed to consider opening the scheme more widely to these staff also. In part this was to recognise the hybridity of many of their roles in professional services, which often involve co-ordinating activities that cross boundaries between academic and support functions (Whitchurch, 2008), therefore creating potential for putting learning about the student experience into practice.

Finally, more detailed methods of evaluating the learning gained by participants could usefully be employed in order to obtain richer data. These might include interviews shortly after the experience and then several weeks or months later. It would also be interesting and illuminating to analyse students’ responses to the scheme.

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## **APPENDIX II**

### **Loose Schedule of Interview Questions for Staff**

#### ***Questions about the choice to participate***

1. What attracted you to volunteer for the scheme?
2. On what basis did you choose your student?
3. Where there any aspects of the student experience which you particularly wanted to learn about?

#### ***Questions about the process***

4. Did you record your observations? eg brief notes during shadowing, or after?
5. Did you learn more from the actual shadowing, or from discussion with your student? Can you explain why?
6. Did you see any students' work? Was that interesting or useful, and if so, how?

#### ***Questions about human relations/feelings/power***

7. Did your student introduce you to other students or staff, or did you introduce yourself? How did you feel about this?
8. How do you feel your presence may have affected other students? Was there any obvious evidence for this?
9. How did the Lecturer(s) react to your presence?
10. How comfortable did you feel during the shadowing?
11. Did your student volunteer any information/opinions which created dilemmas for you (eg in terms of complaints or other issues raised)? How did you handle this?

#### ***Questions about impact on the shadower's understanding of student experience or influence on future practice***

12. To what extent do you feel the shadowing developed your understanding of the student experience?
13. How has the experience changed your practice?

#### ***Questions about the future of the scheme***

14. Did you have additional meetings with your student, before, during or after the experience? Would you recommend your approach to others in future?
15. Is 2 x half-days the right format?

16. If a guide was to be produced for future shadowers, do you have suggestions as to what should be included?
17. Which categories of staff do you feel would benefit most from the experience?

## APPENDIX III

### Staff-Student Shadowing Protocols for Staff

#### Aims of the Scheme

- to increase staff understanding of the daily experience of University of Winchester students
- to suggest ways in which students' experience can be enhanced, for example through improvements to services, systems or facilities
- to open a different communication channel with students

#### Procedure

1. Terri Sandison will match staff with volunteer students, taking into account any special requests for subject areas or characteristics of students
2. Terri will inform students of the name of the member of staff with whom they have been matched
3. Once you have been informed by Terri of your student match, please make contact with them using email or text (or both). Introduce yourself as their 'shadower', describe your role in the University and thank them for giving you the opportunity to shadow them
4. Ask the student to suggest two half-days for the shadowing to take place which are convenient to both you and the student. At least one of the half-days should include timetabled lectures or seminars, and ideally the shadowing overall should also include time spent in social areas, the Library, IT facilities or in SU activity. Make it clear to the student that dates will be confirmed by you once they have been agreed by the scheme co-ordinator.
5. Inform Terri by email of the half-days you have agreed, so that she can seek permission from academic staff whose lectures/seminars will be visited. The dates should be a minimum of 2 weeks ahead of the date you notify Terri (who will already have access to the student's timetable)
6. **It is imperative that you do not visit lectures/seminars unless Terri has first sought permission from academic staff and notified you that she has received their agreement**
  - If permission is not forthcoming from academic staff, or there is some reason why it would not be appropriate for you to visit particular lectures/seminars, Terri will inform you so that you can rearrange the proposed dates in consultation with your student – perhaps by visiting alternative lectures/seminars. You will need to let Terri know the rescheduled dates, so that she can seek again permission from academic staff
7. When permission has been agreed, Terri will inform you. Confirm dates and make arrangements with the student regarding meeting place and time for the first session.

8. When you arrive at a lecture/seminar with the student, introduce yourself to the Lecturer and remind them that you are the student's shadow for that session. Explain that you would like to participate in the session if that is possible, rather than just sitting and observing (although there may be an element of that as well)
9. As far as possible you should engage with the timetabled sessions, or other activities, along with the student. Try to avoid just observing and taking notes as this will not give you such a genuine experience. Join in with discussions and activities if you can.
10. Whilst it may seem difficult, avoid taking time out to deal with emails or other matters. If you do, it will considerably dilute the benefits of your participation in the scheme, and could convey to the student that you are not really serious about understanding their experience
11. After any activity (whether academic or not) discuss with the student how they felt about it, reflect on what they tell you, and make a brief note of this and any other observations you have made
12. Do not let yourself be drawn into discussion about the quality of teaching – the scheme has not been set up to make judgements about staff expertise and it would be highly inappropriate to discuss this with students
13. During the pilot scheme last year, it proved very useful to find some time just to chat generally with the student about their experiences – perhaps going for a coffee together. Please make a note about anything useful you learn from the chat, and feed this back via the on-line survey afterwards
14. Be careful not to give the impression that you are a conduit for student complaints. If your student wishes to complain about aspects of their programme you should suggest that they speak with their Student Academic Representative.
15. As soon as the shadowing experience has ended, contact Terri to let her know. She will then send you a link to complete an on-line survey. This will ask you to:
  - Evaluate how useful the experience was for you personally
  - Suggest improvements to the scheme itself
  - Reflect on the student experience as perceived by you, based on what you have observed and learned from the student and their peers, including positive and less positive aspects
  - Make suggested recommendations for action to enhance the student experience. These might be actions for you, or your team, or they could be suggested actions for other services in the University
16. Terri may contact you later for an interview and to explore your experience in more depth for her research study

17. You may wish to stay in contact with the student on an informal mentoring basis, but this is entirely up to you and the student, and is not a formal part of the scheme

On-line survey results from all participating staff will be aggregated into an overall report which will be sent to PRC in summer 2012.

## APPENDIX IV

### My own experience of participation in the pilot study

I felt it very important that I should participate in the scheme myself – partly to experience the processes and partly to reap the benefits of better understanding the University from the perspective of a student. I paired myself with a third year undergraduate in social sciences. We agreed that I would shadow a lecture, a careers interview and some social time in the Learning Café.

I sought permission from the lecturer due to take the lecture on the date we had agreed, but quickly received the first refusal encountered on the scheme to date. A simple email conveyed the message *'I would have to refuse on this occasion'*. No explanation was given and, in keeping with my agreement with UCU, I did not enter into any further discussion. This incident highlighted for me the importance of seeking union agreement for the scheme and its operation in advance, as the request and refusal were dealt with in a way which did not raise concern about future requests. A second date was agreed with the student and in seeking permission this time from a different Lecturer I received an enthusiastic response by email - *'No problem at all! Come on in!!'*

The first shadowing half-day involved me accompanying the student to a careers interview. Again, I sought and gained permission from the Careers Adviser beforehand. The student and I met and had a brief discussion before the interview, so that I could understand the context and why he had chosen to have a careers interview at this time. As a student in the first semester of his third year he had realised the need not to be *'left behind'* in terms of planning post-graduation.

The careers interview was a 30 minute slot in Student Services. Interestingly I learned straight away that despite this student being a third year, he did not know the location of the careers area and had to be taken there by a friend. The interview focused very clearly on the student's expressed needs, which were to investigate Masters courses, including those abroad. He already had a little information from friends who had gone to study Masters programmes in Scandinavia which were fee-free. The interview was conducted with access to the internet, so the Careers Adviser was able to give information about a range of useful websites and databases covering postgraduate courses in the UK and abroad. These were demonstrated on-line and used to answer questions about the number of places on particular Masters programmes in specific disciplines and possible funding opportunities. She also answered questions about entry to specific careers in related fields, promised to send a follow-up email with website links and contact details for a member of staff versed in European funding, and provided a printed guide on postgraduate funding. Finally, she made suggestions about possibly voluntary work which might aid the student's quest for employment in a particular field. It was clear from discussion with the student afterwards that he had found the interview very helpful.

From this shadowing opportunity I learned a great deal about resources available to help students with career decision-making. I had not known in advance that UK students could study postgraduate programmes for free, or at

very low cost, in some other countries. This information could potentially be useful in talking with school and college students about the benefits of higher education, and I passed the information on to my team of staff who deliver widening participation outreach. I also shared some of the links that had been provided to the student so these could be incorporated into outreach sessions on graduate employability.

After the careers interview I accompanied the student to the Learning Café, where he said he tended to spend time between study commitments. A 'real' shadowing experience on this particular day would, he said, have involved going home with him to watch television! This was because he was due to go back home two days later for Christmas and did not plan to do any additional work before the end of term.

We had a long discussion about his reasons for choosing Winchester, the programmes he had chosen, his perceptions of student life and his experiences of study. From this discussion I learned a number of things which surprised me about course organisation, timetabling, employability issues, use of emails, the learning network, reading lists, contact with administrative staff – all of which I would feed into my summary report for Planning and Resources Committee but were not issues which I could address from the perspective of my own role.

My second shadowing opportunity involved accompanying the student to a lecture. This was attended by 22 students who were drawn from three different subject areas and were studying a common module. I was made to feel welcome by the Lecturer, but the students did not acknowledge my presence in the room – I simply sat alongside the student and seemed to be accepted as one of the group.

Before the lecture began the student showed me the module handbook and commented that it was the '*best*' he had ever had. He mentioned that other module handbooks sometimes contained '*fantasy*' reading lists – meaning that none of the texts were actually available in the Library. He felt that the session outlines and essay titles were very clear, and he made unsolicited comments several times on how good and well organised he felt the Lecturer was. I made a note that comparison of module handbooks and sharing of good practice might be an interesting future research project for the University, and that I would feed this into my summary report.

As an observer, I noted several things which irritated me during the session. There were very few tables in the room, so some students had to take notes on their lap. The room lights failed ten minutes into the session for no obvious reason, meaning that towards the end of the lecture it was really quite dark. A student munched her way noisily through a packet of crisps for ten minutes. I also found myself tiring towards the end of the session and could sense that a few students were also experiencing this.

However, there were many positive aspects to the session, including use of the Learning Network to connect to relevant websites to illustrate particular concepts and historical points. Most students answered questions and many posed questions making it an interactive session, punctuated with many concrete examples and flashes of humour from the Lecturer. I certainly learned a good deal about the topic in question. Students were engaged, respectful and



clearly interested in the subject. Around half a dozen spoke individually with the Lecturer either in a short break or at the end. I was impressed that the Lecturer took pains on a number of occasions to refer to points of grammar and punctuation, clearly aiming to prevent mistakes from occurring in students' written work.

After this lecture I had a final meeting with the student in the Learning Café. I learned more about his third year work and assessments and could clearly see aspects of his experience which he found highly motivating. He made interesting observations about the process of choosing modules and how he felt students would benefit from more support with this. Once again I felt these suggestions were worthy of including in my summary report, though not things I could directly action myself.

Overall then I felt I did gain significant insight into student experience. However, most areas where I could see room for enhancement were not aspects I could directly take forward myself. I saw scope, though, for raising these issues with colleagues for consideration, and reflected that perhaps the aggregate picture which arose from observations of all shadowers in the scheme might coalesce into some kind of coherent set of proposals.